

Huskers Illustrated

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Spring

Forward



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Looking Ahead

***Running game emphasized in spring football;
baseball team rolls toward postseason***



Brian HILL

IN SPRING GAMES, you can do just about anything you want.

The clock did not stop during the second half of Nebraska's annual Red-White Spring Game April 15, the quarterbacks wore green no-contact jerseys, punt returns weren't live, and the defense was not allowed to blitz.

With those among the restrictions for the 15th and final spring practice, the Huskers concentrated on the running game, an area of emphasis for a team that ranked last in the Big 12 Conference and 110th in the nation in rushing in 2005.

While last season's leading rusher Cory Ross was awaiting the 2006 NFL Draft April 29-30, those trying to replace him were showing what they could do behind a mostly rebuilt offensive line. Sophomores Cody Glenn and Marlon Lucky combined to rush 31 times for 183 yards. Lucky scored two touchdowns in the Red squad's 35-7 victory.

The winning team, which included the first-team offense and defense, shut down the White squad, except for a 100-yard kickoff return by Titus Brothers, who completed last season by combining with Zack Bowman to tackle Michigan tight end Tyler Ecker deep in Husker territory on the bizarre final play of the Alamo Bowl.

Although the emphasis was on the

running game, the passing game was not forgotten. Although it paled in comparison to his record-setting 357-yard passing exhibition in the 2005 Spring Game, senior-to-be Zac Taylor completed 14-of-21 for 184 yards and three touchdowns.

While Taylor and Co. were giving fans a preview of what's to come in the fall, the Nebraska baseball team was in the process of sweeping Texas A&M, led by former NU pitching coach Rob Childress. One of Childress' prize pupils a year ago was All-American

Joba Chamberlain, who shares the cover of this issue with Taylor.

Chamberlain is the subject of our baseball feature, and you can also read about pitcher Tony Watson, who has had to respond to many challenges in his career. Sophomore shortstop Ryan Wehrle answers "10 Questions."

Of course, you'll find a lot more about the Spring Game, which drew an

announced attendance of 57,415, considered a full house with Memorial Stadium's north stands closed for construction. That section will be completed this summer, pushing the capacity to more than 80,000 for the Sept. 2 opener against Louisiana Tech.

But even with the north end empty, it was an impressive turnout, as usual, for a spring football scrimmage.

As many as 85 recruits and their families were expected to attend. In the words of Steven Lee, father of Brenham, Texas, quarterback recruit Jarrett Lee, "Great trip, great college setting. They had a great spring game and a great crowd," he told *Huskers Illustrated*. "I was amazed at the support."

Coach Bill Callahan certainly wouldn't argue. "What a great environment for our recruits to be in, to see Memorial Stadium on a Saturday afternoon in the spring," he said after the game. "It can't get any better than this." ■



ON THE COVER

With a strong pitching staff, including junior All-American Joba Chamberlain, and a surprisingly potent offense, the Nebraska baseball team was again moving toward the postseason. The Husker football team, meanwhile, worked on its running game to complement the passing of senior quarterback Zac Taylor. *Cover photos by Scott Bruhn.*

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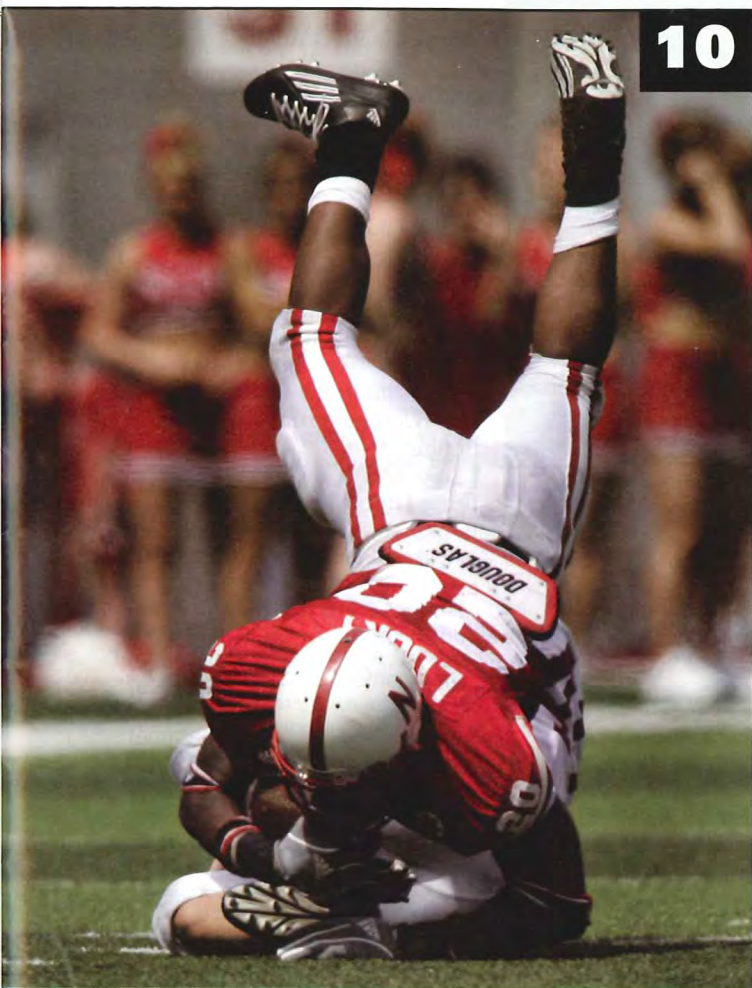
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With I-backs Marlon Lucky (above) and Cody Glenn leading the way, Nebraska's first-team Reds ran and ran, almost twice as much as they passed, in a predictably lopsided 35-7 victory in the annual Red-White Spring Game. *By Mike Babcock*

14 SPRING PRACTICE NOTES

The Spring Game marked the return of a pair of key players — tight end Matt Herian and weakside line-backer Steve Octavien.

NEXT ISSUE

The Football Yearbook (June/July edition) will be mailed about June 15. Check for updates at huskersillustrated.com.

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Power Surge

Brandon Buckman hit two home runs last season, his first at Nebraska. Teammate Jake Opitz hit three, and often reminded him of that, Buckman said — all in good fun, of course.

Buckman can smile about it now. But he was frustrated at the time. He hit 16 home runs during his sophomore season at Garden City (Kan.) Community College, and though he knew the pitching would be much better, he expected to provide some power in the Cornhusker batting order.

He has done that this season. Through mid-April, he had hit 11 home runs.

The reason for the power surge was instruction from Cornhusker assistant Andy Sawyers, according to Buckman. Not so, said Sawyers. "Make sure you give him the credit for that one."

Wherever the credit is to be given, Buckman changed his hitting mechanics so that his back shoulder is above his front shoulder, allowing for better "leverage," Sawyers said.

In so doing, he avoids putting top-spin on the ball, said Buckman.

The two worked on his mechanics in the fall and during the off-season. He hit well in the fall, but started his senior season slowly, struggling again with his swing until the Dairy Queen Classic at Minneapolis the first week in March. That's when he began to see the results.

During a 21-game stretch that began there, he hit 10 home runs, batted .464, raising his average by 186 points, and drove in 31 runs. He also earned the Big 12 player-of-the-week award for March 21-27, after batting .615 in the conference-opening series against Kansas.

And a week later, he hit a one-out home run in the top of the ninth inning for what proved to be the game-winner in a 6-4 victory against Creighton. The home run, his second of the game and eighth of the season, was witnessed by a crowd of 12,276 at Rosenblatt Stadium.

Despite his early season hitting struggles, Buckman said, coach Mike Anderson continued to encourage him. "Coach A told me, 'You've worked too hard to not have a great season.'"

He and Luke Gorsett have given Nebraska power in the middle of the batting order, Buckman from the left side, Gorsett from the right, following in a growing tradition that includes Alex Gordon and Curtis Ledbetter last season



Brandon Buckman and Luke Gorsett (inset) have given the Huskers power in the middle of the order.

and Dan Johnson and Matt Hopper in 2000-01.

Johnson and Hopper set the standard for a duo, each hitting 21 homes runs in 2000.

Through mid-April, Gorsett ranked second in the nation in home runs with 14. The junior from Denver also transferred from Garden City Community College — where he hit 39 home runs and drove in 121 runs in two seasons. Garden City has been good to Nebraska. Ledbetter played there as well.

Buckman and Gorsett have developed a friendly home-run rivalry. "Luke's doing a great job," said Buckman. "I keep telling him I'm going to be coming after him."

He doesn't go to bat trying to hit home runs, however, Buckman said.



Texas A&M coach Rob Childress and NU's Mike Anderson exchange lineup cards.

Rather, he looks to drive the ball. The home runs are a by-product of focus and proper mechanics.

Hitting is a matter of constant adjustment. As with a golf swing, the problems it poses are never eliminated. "You never really solve it," Sawyers said. "You've got to manage it."

Buckman believes Sawyers' advice has helped him manage his swing.

Sawyers disagrees. "He knows his swing better than anybody," said Sawyers.

Whether Sawyers or Buckman is the reason, the results speak for themselves. Buckman hit as many home runs against Creighton at Rosenblatt Stadium as he did all of last season. He also hit two home runs against Minnesota in the Dairy Queen Classic and two home runs in a game against Illinois State.

So Opitz hasn't brought up his three home runs in 2005 lately, Buckman said.

"And I haven't said anything."

HUSKER HOME RUN POWER

Dan Johnson	25 (2001)
Jed Morris	23 (2002)
Ken Harvey	23 (1999)
Matt Hopper	22 (2003)
Matt Hopper	21 (2000)
Dan Johnson	21 (2000)
Bobby Benjamin	21 (1988)
Steve Stanicek	20 (1982)
Alex Gordon	19 (2005)
Darin Erstad	19 (1995)

IF YOU BUILD IT . . .

Nebraska baseball has been a hot ticket this spring. The Cornhuskers' three-game series with Texas A&M on the weekend of the Red-White football game drew 24,490 to Hawks Field at Haymarket Park, with a school-record 8,757 on hand for Friday's 4-3 victory against the Aggies.

The previous record was 8,711, set against Miami in the NCAA Super-Regional on June 11, 2005. The Cornhuskers swept the series behind the pitching of starters Joba Chamberlain, Tony Watson and Johnny Dorn, who went the distance, posting a 6-0 shutout in the final game.

Dorn allowed eight hits, all singles, and no Aggie runner reached third base. The sophomore right-hander from Grand Island, Neb., struck out seven without a walk.

The series marked the return of former Cornhusker pitching coach Rob Childress, who is in his first season as the head coach at Texas A&M.

VOLLEYBALL SCHEDULE

Coach John Cook's volleyball team will make another run at an NCAA championship with a match against San Diego at the NU Coliseum on Aug. 29. The Huskers' 2006 schedule includes 17 home matches at the Coliseum and another at the Qwest Center in Omaha against Creighton.

The Qwest Center will play host to the NCAA Volleyball Championships in 2006 and 2008.

"We were forced to do some scrambling because of teams canceling," Cook said in a release. "But I think it worked out for us when you look at our schedule."

The schedule, which includes nine matches against teams finishing in the Top 25 of the final 2005 AVCA/CSTV coaches poll, "will get us prepared for the Big 12," he said.

Opening opponent San Diego was among 16 NCAA Tournament qualifiers in 2005 on Nebraska's 28-match schedule. After the San Diego match, the Huskers play host to a pair of tournaments before being conference play against Kansas, also at the Coliseum, on Sept. 13.

Four starters return, including AVCA national player of the year Christina Houghtelling and two-time first-team All-American Sarah Pavan, from the NCAA runner-up and Big 12 champion.

The Huskers defeated Purdue (3-1) and Creighton (3-0) during their spring season. The Creighton match drew 1,588 to the Coliseum on the Saturday of the spring football game.

Nebraska's off-season competition will continue when they make a trip to China and Japan from May 17 to June 3, playing six matches against teams from those countries.

That the NCAA championship finals will be played in Omaha twice in three years is a tribute to the enthusiasm for volleyball in the state. Record crowds attended an NCAA regional at the Qwest Center in December of 2005, including an NCAA tournament record 15,119 for the final match. An additional 1,500 seats will be added in time for this year's championships, bringing capacity to nearly 17,000.

The 2006 championships are sold out.

The schedule:

Aug. 29 — San Diego

Sept. 1-3 — Labor Day Tournament (St. Mary's, Long Beach State, Middle Tennessee State); **8-10** — Players Challenge (Minnesota, Cal Poly, Louisville); **13** — Kansas; **16** — at Oklahoma; **20** — Iowa State; **23** — Texas Tech; **24** — at Creighton; **30** — at Baylor

Oct. 4 — Kansas State; **7** — at Texas A&M; **11** — at Missouri; **14** — Colorado; **18** — at Texas; **25** — Missouri; **28** — at Kansas State

Nov. 1 — at Texas Tech; **4** — Oklahoma; **8** — at Iowa State; **11** — at Colorado; **15** — Texas A&M; **18** — Baylor; **22** — at Kansas; **25** — Texas

NCAA Tournament

Nov. 30-Dec. 3 — First/Second Rounds, campus sites; **Dec. 8-9** — Regionals, Gainesville, Fla.; Austin, Texas; Seattle, Wash.; Honolulu, Hawaii; **Dec. 14** — Semifinals, Omaha; **Dec. 16** — Finals, Omaha

VOLLEYBALL RECRUITING

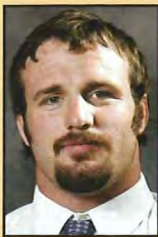
The Husker volleyball program has received oral commitments to sign letters of intent from three high school juniors for its 2007 recruiting class, according to the Lincoln Journal Star. The most recent of the commitments came from Kayla Banwarth of Dubuque, Iowa. She joins Tara Mueller of Scottsdale, Ariz., and Lindsey Licht of Aurora, Colo. The oral commitments are non-binding.

Quick Hits

GOOD CITIZENS

The Nebraska athletic department announced its 10th annual Brook Berringer Citizenship Team in conjunction with the Red-White game. Fullback Dane Todd headed the list, earning the recognition for a fourth time, while offensive linemen Greg Austin and Kurt Mann and place-kickers Jake Wesch and Eric Lueshen were included on the team for a second time. First-time honorees were cornerback Cortney Grixby, I-back Brandon Jackson, fullback Matt Senske, quarterback Zac Taylor, punter Dan Titchener and offensive lineman Brandon Koch, who has completed his eligibility. The honorees were introduced prior to the game, with former Cornhusker Curt Tomasevicz presenting the awards. Tomasevicz, a member of the team in 2003, was part of the United States bobsled team at the 2006 Winter Olympics.

The award, for volunteering in the community, was established in honor of former Cornhusker quarterback Brook Berringer, who died in a plane crash in April of 1996.



B.J. Padden

WRESTLING WRAP-UP

Seniors B.J. Padden and Jacob Klein both earned All-America recognition as the Huskers finished 16th in the NCAA Championships at Oklahoma City in mid-March. Padden finished third at 197 pounds, while Klein finished seventh at 174 pounds. The All-America honors were the second for both. Padden and Klein were the only ones among Nebraska's nine NCAA qualifiers who won't return next season.

The Cornhuskers were 12-5 in dual meets this season.

Individual awards: **Outstanding Wrestler** — Padden; **Lincoln Optimist Club** — Rob Plambeck; **Husker Power Lifter of the Year** — Padden; **Spirit of Excellence** — Vince Jones; **Most Improved** — Robert Sanders; **Granite (toughness through injuries)** — Dominick Moyer; **Most Dedicated** — Klein; **Co-Redshirts of the Year** — Stefan Tighe, Levi Wofford, Kenny Jordan, Craig Brester, Mike Rowe.

GYMNASTICS AWARD

Sophomore gymnast Emily Parsons, a four-time All-American, was named the 2006 South Central Regional "Gymnast of the Year" award from the National Association of Collegiate Gymnastics Coaches. Former Husker Richelle Simpson earned the award in 2003 and 2005.

Former Huskers Courtney Brown (1999) and Heather Brink (2000) also won the award, which is chosen in a vote of coaches in the South Central Region.

NO THIRD STRAIGHT

Coach Bill Straub's Husker bowling team came up short in its quest for a third consecutive NCAA championship, losing in the semifinals at Houston, Texas, to Alabama A&M, which had put them in the elimination bracket. They had battled back against Central Missouri State and New Jersey City.

Junior Adrienne Miller earned a place on the all-tournament team. The Huskers had won 14 consecutive tournaments over three seasons before losing in Houston. Nebraska will play host to the 2007 NCAA Women's Bowling Championships, scheduled for April 12-4. The location of the event had yet to be determined.

BRIEFLY

● Four members of the Husker rifle team earned All-America recognition: senior Misty Chanek, junior Kristina Fehlings and sophomores Andrea Franzen and Kirsten Weiss.

● Former Cornhusker third baseman and national player of the year Alex Gordon, the second player selected in the 2005 Major League draft, hit a home run in his first professional game with the Wichita (Kan.) Wranglers. The Wranglers are the Double-A affiliate of the Kansas City Royals.

● GOAL, a non-profit organization established by former Cornhusker linebacker Jerry Murtaugh, a co-captain on the 1970 national championship team, is sponsoring its annual golf-outing fund-raiser at Omaha's Shadow Ridge Country Club on May 9. Among those playing in the celebrity event are Tommie Frazier, Mike Knox, Johnny Rodgers, Jim Skow and Aaron Taylor.

The GOAL mission is the promotion of nutrition, exercise and fitness in schools. "We work with the whole student body, faculty and staff," said Murtaugh, "teaching them how to eat properly and exercise, making it a lifestyle." Murtaugh also is a volunteer football coach at Omaha's Creighton Prep.

● Former Cornhusker quarterback Scott Frost will be on the Kansas State sideline when Nebraska plays the Wildcats at Manhattan on Oct. 14. Frost joined the staff of first-year Kansas State head coach Ron Prince as a graduate assistant. Wildcats defensive coordinator Raheem Morris coached Frost when he played safety for the NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers. "It's not like I'm jumping ship. I'll always have Nebraska in the middle of my heart," Frost told the Lincoln Journal Star.

● Former Cornhusker football player Jeff Souder, one of 13 true freshmen who played last season, has transferred to the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Souder, who is from Bellevue, Neb., played primarily on special teams. He left Nebraska for undisclosed personal reasons. ■

'Compete Every Day'

Backup safety Eisenhart knows 'you make your mark in the spring'



**Mike
BABCOCK**

THE ELBOW WAS BURNING when Ben Eisenhart woke up one morning midway through spring football practice. It was swollen "like a volleyball," he said, exaggerating only slightly.

Clearly, he had a problem. "I was like, 'That's not good,' " he said, understating.

Turf burns are commonplace on artificial surfaces. And this appeared to be a turf burn that had become infected. Eisenhart took antibiotics and continued to practice.

Spring football is crucial for those competing for jobs, as he was. The junior-to-be from Culbertson, Neb., was trying to position himself on the depth chart at strong safety. So missing even one of the 15 practices allowed by the NCAA could have been significant.

The antibiotics didn't seem to be working, however. The swelling didn't subside. At the risk of being indelicate, it was "almost like a humongous pimple," said Eisenhart.

So on Thursday of the week before the Red-White game he had minor surgery. "They knocked me out, cut it open and cleaned it out," he said. "I would rather have been practicing."

The next Monday, he was. The elbow hurt, but it no longer resembled a volleyball.

Eisenhart smiled as he recounted the experience. He wasn't complaining. Everyone plays through aches and pains, through minor injuries. Those who don't . . . well, they don't play.

Two years ago, Eisenhart contracted mono and missed most of spring practice, including the Red-White game. Coach Bill Callahan had just arrived, and Eisenhart, a freshman walk-on who had played eight-man football in high school, was concerned his Cornhusker career might be brief.

The coaches didn't know much about him, and though Callahan had indicated an intention to continue Nebraska's tradition of embracing walk-ons, their numbers were dropping. That trend had preceded Callahan. But he was criticized for it. So Eisenhart's concern was understandable.

"I was like, 'Wow, am I going to get shipped out?' " said Eisenhart.

He didn't get shipped out. But he didn't play much as a redshirted freshman, either. He got in three games, to be exact, and only briefly. Mostly, he played on the scout team.

Last season, he played in every game on special teams. He also was a reserve cornerback, moving from strong safety, a position at which he was more comfortable. So when he was given the opportunity to move back to strong safety just before the start of spring practice, he took it.

"I'm a better tackler than I am a cover guy," Eisenhart said.

The 57,000-plus at the Red-White game certainly could attest to his tackling ability. He was credited with nine tackles, a game-high total, tying Whites teammate Andy Kadavy.

"I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing," defensive coordinator Kevin Cosgrove said afterward. "They were 'creasing' us a little bit with that second defense."

In any case, "Ben's had a nice spring for us, did a lot of good things, tremendous special-teams player for us, good team guy. I liked his progress during the spring."

That was Eisenhart's goal. "It's a big spring for me," he said three days before the Red-White game. "Going into the fall, things are tweaked a little bit, but pretty much everything is set. So you make your mark in the spring. You've got to compete every day."

He competed every day but two, because of the infection. The missed practices would have been more of a concern were he younger. But "the coaches know what I can do," Eisenhart said. "It's kind of like you earn your stripes. It's not like I'm going to get totally thrown out of the mix."

He'll go into training camp as the back-up to Tierre Green, who also moved from cornerback.

"Spring ball is a stressful time, trying to get your spot on the depth chart," said Eisenhart. In addition, the university's spring semester is drawing to a close, which means final papers and exams.

In addition to finals, he had a 15-page term paper for History 288 "due in a couple of weeks," he said. But spring practice "gets over early enough that you still have two weeks to prepare.

Anybody who can't study for something in two weeks, I think they're lying to you."

He would be lying if he said spring practice had gone by quickly.

"I wouldn't go that far," he said, smiling. "Spring ball is fun. Everybody loves football. Everybody loves playing. But daylight savings time comes, the weather's nice and you're looking forward to summer. You kind of need that little break before football (training camp)."

Don't get the wrong idea, though. "You think about that stuff off the field," Eisenhart said. "But when you're out here, it's all about football."

Minor surgery kept him off the field, but only for two days. ■



Safety Ben Eisenhart had nine tackles in the Spring Game.

Mike Babcock is a former sports columnist for the Lincoln Journal Star. He has covered Nebraska football for more than 25 years. Mike can be reached at MBABCOCK1@neb.rr.com or P.O. Box 6782, Lincoln, NE 68506.

Growing Up Fast

Nebraska sophomore pitcher Watson responds to challenges on and off the field



Curt McKEEVER

NEBRASKA PITCHER TONY WATSON had just run his record to 3-0 with five shutout innings during a 10-0 win against South Dakota State on March 17.

It was the kind of effort that would make you think Watson was feeling completely sure about himself as he prepared to take the next step in his development as a Husker: Starting a Big 12 Conference regular-season game.

He wasn't, which might tell you a little something about why the left-handed sophomore sat 6-0 after throwing a complete-game five-hitter in NU's 4-3 win against Texas A&M on April 14.

"I didn't think I had my stuff, probably my worst outing, and I just knew I had to work harder, especially with the Big 12 coming up," Watson said of his mid-March performance against the Jackrabbits. "I was feeding off that outing."

Actually, according to Nebraska first-year pitching coach Dave Bingham, Watson's hunger should have started last June at the College World Series.

That's when he gave up a sawed-off RBI single to Arizona State's J.J. Sferra that eliminated the Huskers 8-7 in 11 innings.

"No way he should've gotten a piece of the ball off Tony," Bingham claimed. "As good as Tony's stuff looks, that should've been a swing and a miss instead of a flare to the outfield."

Forward to 2006. Watson is more deceptive, spotting his fastball with better consistency and developing his off-speed stuff into pitches that get him key outs.

"Everything's kind of fell in place for him," Bingham said.

Trust me, this story hasn't been produced with ease.

After being deemed a good enough prospect to be selected by the Florida Marlins in the 23rd round of the 2003 major league draft, the 6-foot-4 product from Grimes, Iowa, opted to become a Husker.

But he was forced to sit out the 2004 season after surgery was performed in January of that year to repair a torn labrum in his right shoulder.

While he was working his way back, Watson also had to deal with an emotional family situation. His mother, Angie, had been diagnosed with melanoma, a disease that took her life last November.

Somehow, Watson was able to respond to those challenges with the maturity of a person well beyond his years and establish himself as the steadiest of Husker pitchers. And that includes All-American Joba Chamberlain and 2005 Big 12 Freshman Pitcher of the Year Johnny Dorn.

"You really have no choice," Watson said. "I had to grow up fast. I think that sort of carries over to the mound."

Last season, Watson compiled a 6-1 record and 2.82 earned-run average to earn a spot on Collegiate Baseball's Freshman All-American team. Just five of his 23 appearances, though, came in starting roles. And he threw just five innings

during the regular season against Big 12 competition.

No wonder that prior to this season Watson was just hoping to be in the mix of those who were fighting for the No. 3 starter's spot.

"I was out there as a freshman doing pretty good," he said. "You're just scared to fail, maybe."

No longer.

His April 14 outing against Texas A&M left him with a career-long performance for the third straight game and gave him a 6-0 record and 2.05 ERA (second-lowest among Big 12 starters) over team-high 61 1/3 innings.

Dating to last season, it was Watson's 11th straight win.

His latest came after he'd given up a three-run, fifth-inning homer that erased a 2-0 Nebraska lead. Thereafter, Watson allowed just two hits and a walk.

"He's so much more mature. He gave up the big home run and didn't panic," said A&M coach Rob Childress, who was Watson's pitching coach at NU last season. "I'm not seeing the same nervous guy when things aren't going his way."

Watson sported a grin of agreement when told about Childress' comment.

"I really think I have matured as a pitcher," he said. "A three-run bomb — I mean, I really couldn't tell any letdown after it."

"That's really one thing Coach Bingham's stressed, get out there and control your tempo and go pitch by pitch, inning by inning and you'll be fine. That's what I've been trying to do — don't worry about the last pitch."

Just like he doesn't worry about the process of jumping from successful mid-week relief performer to Big 12 Conference starter.

"Every time you go out there, no matter if you're a starter or a reliever, you've just got to go out and be confident you're going to throw strikes," he said. "If you're not going to throw strikes, you're not going to pitch in this program."

Following his performance against A&M, Watson had a strikeouts-to-walks ratio of better than 3-to-1 (48 strikeouts, 15 walks).

"I just have more confidence in myself out there, and my pitches," Watson said. "My arm feels the best it's felt since surgery. The doctor told me the second year (post surgery) you'll feel the best. It's definitely (true). I feel like the rubber arm I had in high school."

And the Huskers, no doubt, will be calling on his glue many more times in their quest to return to the CWS.

"Baseball's all about rhythm," Watson said after his complete-game performance helped leave the Huskers with a nine-game winning streak. "We're on a roll right now. We're doing the little things to win ballgames, and that's what matters." ■



Tony Watson won his first six decisions this season.

Curt McKeever is a sportswriter for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football, he is the primary beat writer for the men's basketball and baseball teams. He can be reached at cmckeever@journalstar.com



***On
The***

Run

By Mike Babcock ● Photos by Scott Bruhn

10 MAY 2006

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Sophomore I-backs Cody Glenn (34, left) and Marlon Lucky (20, above) combined to carry 31 times for 183 yards. Glenn finished with 98 yards, while Lucky had 85 yards and two touchdowns.

'We really wanted to test our young backs and see how they held up'

And so it came not to pass but to run in the Spring Game. Nebraska's first-team Reds ran and ran, almost twice as much as they passed, in a predictably lopsided 35-7 victory.

The game-conditions scrimmage — with running clock during the second half, no live punt returns and quarterbacks wearing green no-contact jerseys — could have been promoted as Turn Back the Clock Day at Memorial Stadium. The Reds played offense like the Cornhuskers of old, anyway.

They ran inside and out, but mostly inside. "We still wanted to get our throws in, work on our protection game and work on the timing to keep Zac (Taylor) sharp," coach Bill Callahan said afterward. "But we really wanted to test our young backs and see how they held up."

The "young backs" were Cody Glenn and Marlon Lucky, or Marlon Lucky and Cody Glenn; neither finished spring ahead of the other, according to running backs coach Randy Jordan.

"It's the committee system," said Jordan. "We roll with the one that's hot."

Leon Jackson, who pulled on a red jersey for the second half, also is in the committee. And Brandon Jackson will be

when he's healthy, as will junior college transfer Kenny Wilson come fall.

Or, at least, competition within the committee will resume then.

During the spring, however, Glenn and Lucky were the featured backs, as was apparent in the Red-White game. They divided 31 carries and gained a combined 183 yards.

Glenn appeared to have an edge early in the spring. But Lucky made up ground.

The "last couple of practices" Lucky was running more physically, "doing a super job in terms of finishing his runs, not looking to bounce the ball (outside) so quickly, just realizing that a 4-yard run is a good run and if that 20- or 30-yard scamper comes off, we take it," Jordan said. "But the first thing is, you get me my 4 yards, and then the rest is yours. He's learning that concept really well."

Lucky got the 4 yards and a touchdown to start the scoring in the first quarter and finished it for the Reds with a 6-yard touchdown run in the third quarter. Titus Brothers prevented the White team from being shut out by returning the ensuing kickoff 100 yards for a touchdown.

"That's something we worked on the entire spring, the return game," said Callahan. "That was an area we have to improve, and that's an area I thought we did improve."

FEATURE STORY

The Cornhuskers ranked sixth in the Big 12 and 79th nationally in kickoff returns last season.

They ranked last in the conference and 110th in the nation in rushing, averaging fewer than 100 yards per game, with only 10 rushing touchdowns, underscoring a dire need for improvement.

Last season, Nebraska threw 444 passes and rushed 420 times. In the Spring Game, the Red team's pass-to-run ratio was 27-to-47. Taylor threw 21 of the passes, completing 14 for 184 yards and touchdowns, in order, to Todd Peterson, Dane Todd and Josh Mueller.

"I didn't ask him to do a lot," Callahan said of Taylor. "I just wanted him to manage the offense, get the guys in and out, and make some simple, routine throws."

Joe Ganz took over for Taylor in the second half, after directing the



The Red team did pass for 195 yards, including this 29-yard reception by wide receiver Nate Swift (87), trying to elude linebacker Phillip Dillard (38).

White team during the first half, while Harrison Beck watched from the sideline. Beck was hampered by a

sore right shoulder the final two weeks of spring practice, but had expected to play after an MRI revealed no significant damage.

After watching Beck in warm-ups, however, Callahan decided to hold him out.

"It was really a sad sight for me to see Harrison go out in the warm-ups and not be able to even flick the ball with his wrist," Callahan said. "He was pushing it in the pre-game."

A second MRI after the Spring Game produced results similar to the first, leaving Callahan optimistic about Beck's chances of participating in summer conditioning and voluntary workouts.

Among the others watching were linebackers Stewart Bradley and Bo Ruud, both of whom wore green jerseys throughout the spring while recovering from injuries. Bradley was able to participate in "high-and-hard" drills the last week and a half, but he was held out of scrimmaging.

The White team had little success against the No. 1 defense, which defensive coordinator Kevin Cosgrove described earlier in the week as potentially as good as any he's coached.

The defense was restricted for the Spring Game, no blitzing. "We played all zone (coverage), basically," said Cosgrove. "I saw guys competing out there and having fun."

"That's what we wanted them to do. We wanted to see how young kids would react in a game-like situation. And it was certainly a game-like situation today."

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The announced attendance of 57,415 was a full house with Memorial Stadium's north stands closed for construction.

Announced attendance was 57,415, below the past two Spring Game totals but a full house nonetheless with Memorial Stadium's north end zone stands closed for construction that will increase capacity to more than 80,000. The crowd was "outstanding," Cosgrove said, "go Husker fans."

"Warming up, it felt like a game," said Taylor. "I kind of got the same feeling right before a game starts and all that stuff. It really gets you excited to play the game."

Taylor was asked about the day's emphasis on running.

"Without a doubt, that's what we wanted to do," he said. "We really emphasized the run in the spring, so that's a great balance."

As Jordan pointed out, the running game was more physical than flashy.

"Yards after contact were huge," Taylor said. "They made some great cuts before they got hit, but after they got hit, they'd break a tackle and get that extra yard. They were tough runners."

Physical play was an emphasis throughout the spring for everyone, not just the running backs. "This is the most contact, scrimmaging, that we've done at Nebraska since I've been here," said Callahan. "It's been a very physical spring for our players, very taxing from a physical aspect."

"So I commend our players for stretching themselves, for going through the daily grind that you have to go through when you have practices this physical." ■



Titus Brothers prevented the White team from being shut out by returning a kickoff 100 yards for a touchdown (right) in the third quarter.

Welcome Back Matt

Matt Herian, first-team All-Big 12 as a sophomore, last played in the eighth game of the 2004 season, sustaining a broken leg in the first half against Missouri. The senior tight end from Pierce, Neb., returned to action in the Red-White game, after being limited by a sore hamstring early in the spring. His only opportunity for a pass reception came on the final play of the first quarter, in the end zone.

Linebacker Dontrell Moore was covering him. "I'm sure he wanted that one catch, but aside from that, it was just good to see him get in there and compete," coach Bill Callahan said.

Remember Steve?

Weakside linebacker Steve Octavien's Cornhusker career amounts to a few seconds into the second quarter of last season's opening game against Maine, when he suffered a broken leg. But he was credited with four tackles, including two for losses, during his brief appearance — 14 snaps.

The junior-to-be from Naples, Fla., made two tackles and intercepted a pass for the Red team. "Not too many runs came my way," he said. "I couldn't do anything spectacular."

As for the interception, "I tried to take it to the house, but it didn't work out that way."

Octavien had a good spring, according to defensive coordinator Kevin Cosgrove, though "he's not where he was at the beginning of last fall. He's got to get in better condition; he knows that. But he certainly has the ability," said Cosgrove. "I think you saw that out there today."

Octavien doesn't have the starting job locked up, however. Bo Ruud will return in the fall and "he's going to compete; I know that," Cosgrove said. "They make each other better." ■



Quarterback Zac Taylor (13) welcomed back tight end Matt Herian (11).



Linebacker Steve Octavien (15) returned to action and had the game's only interception.

SPRING FOOTBALL NOTES

D-LINE DEPTH

With the departure of Le Kevin Smith and Titus Adams, developing depth in the defensive line was among the goals in the spring. And it was accomplished, according to defensive coordinator Kevin Cosgrove.

Seniors-to-be Ola Dagunduro and Barry Cryer were the first-team tackles, with Ndamukong Suh and Ty Steinkuhler, who moved inside from defensive end, backing them up. Zach Potter joined Barry Turner and returning starters Adam Carriker and Jay Moore at end.

"I'm pleased with those young guys, the progress they made," said Cosgrove.

Even though he played with the White team, Suh was impressive in the Spring Game, Callahan said. "If you really had a chance to look at him against the ones, he was quite disruptive many times down on the goal line, in normal down-and-distance situations. He's been a load to block the entire spring."

SUPER FREAK

Carriker also was a load to block during the spring. He reported at nearly 300 pounds, prompting middle line-backer Corey McKeon to describe him as a "freak of nature." During winter conditioning "a lot of people increased their game, but he's one of the guys that really stick out," McKeon said before spring practice began. "He's gotten bigger and stronger and faster at the same time."

SECONDARY CONSIDERATION

Tierre Green moved to strong safety in the spring, after playing cornerback last season — and I-back as a redshirted freshman — and Andrew Shanle worked at free safety with the first team in the spring. They are the top candidates to replace Daniel Bullocks and Blake Tiedtke, respectively.

"I thought they performed well as the spring went on, continued to get better," Cosgrove said. "It was a pretty good transition for Tierre. I like the way he gets downhill in his run support."

In addition to Green and Shanle, "we had some young guys step up," said Cosgrove.

Despite some inexperience, "we're a step ahead of where we were last spring," McKeon said. "People have filled their roles already. That's something that didn't come together until fall camp (a year ago). Guys are stepping up, Ola and Cryer and both safeties.

"Shanle and Tierre, they're filling their roles fast. They know their responsibilities."

GETTING HIS KICKS

Sophomore-to-be Dan Titchener, a walk-on from Cheyenne, Wyo., was "the No. 1 punter we featured this spring," said Callahan. "Danny, I think, has done an excellent job."

Titchener averaged 44.5 yards on two punts, while Tyler Kester, a walk-on from Clearwater, Neb., averaged 48 yards on two punts for the White team. Competition to replace Sam Koch will continue in the fall, Callahan said, and will include not only Jake Wesch and Jordan Alegria, both of whom punted for the White team as well, but also Alex Henery, an incoming freshman walk-on from Omaha.

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE, REDS

The Spring Game's outcome was determined when the teams were identified — first-unit Reds against the rest of the team, Whites. "We've got a good roster of talent," Callahan said beforehand. "I don't know that we're extremely deep to go switch up, draft teams, which I've been accustomed to in my early years of coaching. I would look forward to that if we had that luxury. But unfortunately we don't.

"So we're just going to try to maximize this 15th practice and utilize it as a catapult for training camp and hopefully transmit what we did here in spring ball into training camp."

RISE AND SHINE

Practice on the Thursday before the Spring Game began at 5:45 a.m. in order to accommodate players with classes, many begin-



Ola Dagunduro (54) and Barry Cryer (94) joined returning starters Adam Carriker (90) and Jay Moore (44) on the top unit defensive line.

ning at 8 a.m. Since the regular spring practice days were Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, players tried to schedule classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

By practicing on Thursday, players had a day off leading into the Spring Game. The team also practiced at 5:45 a.m. on the Thursday before the first Saturday scrimmage.

The final Thursday practice was just as important as the Spring Game, if not more so, according to offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Jay Norvell. "In practices, we put them in specific game situations," he said. "You know, we stretch them a little more. "Every day we come out here it's important. We don't practice just to get them out here early in the morning." He arrived at 4 a.m. for the practice, by the way.

Cornerbacks coach Phil Elmassian probably was there to meet Norvell. "Coach 'Elmo' was probably here at 3 (a.m.)," tight ends coach Shawn Watson said after the first 5:45 practice.

INSIDE, MOSTLY

Because of the construction at the north end of Memorial Stadium, the Cornhuskers practiced most of the spring in the new Hawks Championship Center, even when the weather was conducive to practicing outside. The first practice there was on the Monday before the Red-White game.

Football should be played outdoors, sophomore-to-be Ndamukong Suh said. "But I don't want to be outside when it's below 20 (degrees). I know it gets cold here."

Suh, who is from Portland, Ore., said practicing inside wasn't a problem. "I guess there is a little bit of difference. The fields are a little different. Out here, it's a little harder."

GUEST SPEAKER

Tampa Bay Buccaneers coach Jon Gruden was the featured speaker at the annual coaches' clinic the second weekend of the spring. Gruden and Callahan coached together for seven years in the NFL. Callahan was Gruden's offensive coordinator with the Oakland Raiders. "To see Bill running the show just brought back great memories for me, and I think it probably gives Nebraska a lot of high hopes for the future," said Gruden. "They run a very good practice, well organized and very efficient."

Gruden said the clinic was his first as a speaker and that he agreed to attend because of a "chance to spend four or five hours with Bill Callahan. I wanted to rekindle my friendship with him. I miss him, and I'm proud of what he's doing here. I know what he's up against. I know the challenges he has."

MULKEY DISMISSED

On the Wednesday after the Spring Game, coach Bill Callahan announced that Grant Mulkey, a senior-to-be from Arlington, Texas, had been dismissed from the team for unspecified violation of team policies. Mulkey, a wide receiver, caught 45 passes in 27 games during his career. ■

GAME STATS

SCORING

April 15, 2006
Memorial Stadium Lincoln, Neb.
Attendance 57,415

	1	2	3	4	F
Nebraska White	0	0	7	0	7
Nebraska Red	14	14	7	0	35

First Quarter

	W	R
R Lucky 4-yard Run (Congdon Kick) 08:06 Drive: 11 plays 62 yds 4:16	0	7

R Peterson Pass from Taylor 23 yards (Congdon Kick) 05:18 Drive: 4 plays 69 yds 1:37	0	14
--	---	----

Second Quarter

R Todd Pass from Taylor 3 yards (Congdon Kick) 13:10 Drive: 9 plays 65 yds 3:42	0	21
---	---	----

R Mueller Pass from Taylor 7 yards (Congdon Kick) 00:34 Drive: 9 plays 70 yds 2:07	0	28
--	---	----

Third Quarter

R Lucky 6-yard Run (Congdon Kick) 05:52 Drive: 4 plays 17 yds	0	35
---	---	----

W Brothers TD KO Return 100 yards (Wesch Kick) 03:45	7	35
---	---	----

TEAM STATS

	W	R
Total First Downs	14	10
Rushing	2	4
Passing	12	14
Penalty	0	0
Total First Downs	2	28
Rushing	1	17
Passing	1	8
Penalty	0	3
Rushing Attempts	12	47
Yards Gained Rushing	23	238
Yards Lost Rushing	33	19
Net Yards Rushing	-10	219
Net Yards Passing	14	195
Passes Attempted	19	27
Passes Completed	4	15
Had Intercepted	1	0
Percent Completion	21.1%	55.6%
Yards per Attempt	0.7	7.2
Yards per Completion	3.5	13.0
Total Offensive Plays	31	74
Total Net Yards	4	414
Avg. Gain Per Play	0.1	5.6
Fumbles: No-Lost	0-0	1-0
Penalties: No-Yards	6-40	1-11
Punts: No-Yards	7-286	2-89
Avg. Per Punt	40.9	44.5
Punt Returns: No-Yards	0-0	0-0
Kickoff Returns: No-Yards	4-162	2-28
Interception Returns: No-Yards	0-0	1-5
Fumble Returns: No-Yards	0-0	0-0
Miscellaneous Yards	0	0
Possession Time	17:24	33:28
Third-Down Conversions	2-9	8-13
Percentage	22.2%	61.5%
Fourth-Down Conversions	0-0	1-2
Percentage	0.0%	50.0%
Sacks By: No-Yards	2-13	5-30

2006 SCHEDULE

Sept. 2	Louisiana Tech
Sept. 9	Nicholls State
Sept. 16	@USC
Sept. 23	Troy
Sept. 30	Kansas
Oct. 7	@Iowa State
Oct. 14	@Kansas State
Oct. 21	Texas
Oct. 28	@Oklahoma State
Nov. 4	Missouri
Nov. 11	@Texas A&M
Nov. 24	Colorado

16 MAY 2006



Sophomore wide receiver Todd Peterson breaks loose on a 23-yard touchdown reception.

INDIVIDUAL STATS

RED

	No	Gain	Lost	Net	Avg	TD	Lg
Glenn	16	98	0	98	6.1	0	13
Lucky	15	85	1	84	5.6	2	17
L. Jackson	9	48	0	48	5.3	0	12
Taylor	7	7	18	-11	-1.6	0	6
Total	47	238	19	219	4.7	2	17

	Att	Comp	%	Int	Yds	TD	Lg
Taylor	21	14	66.7	0	184	3	34
Ganz	6	1	16.7	0	11	0	11
Total	27	15	55.6	0	195	3	34

	No	Yds	TD	Lg
Nunn	4	60	0	34
Swift	2	41	0	29
Peterson	2	34	1	23
Todd	3	30	1	21
Lucky	2	18	0	9
Mueller	1	7	1	7
Hardy	1	5	0	5
Total	15	195	3	34

	No	Yds	TD	Lg
Total	0	0	0	0

	No	Yds	TD	Lg
Green	1	18	0	18
Nunn	1	10	0	10
Total	2	28	0	18

	No	Avg	Lg	Blk	TB	FC	50+	In	20
Titchener	2	44.5	46	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	2	44.5	46	0	0	1	0	0	1

	Made	Att	Lg	Blkd
Congdon	0	1	0	0
Total	0	1	0	0

	Solo	Asst	Tot	TFL	Sack	PD	FF	FR
McKeon	3	4	7	2-10	1-7	0	0	0
Cryer	2	1	3	2-13	2-13	0	0	0
Dagunduro	2	0	2	2-10	2-10	0	0	0
Green	0	2	2	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Octavien	1	1	2	0-0	0-0	1	0	0
Brandeiburgh	0	1	1	0-0	0-0	1	0	0
Carriker	0	1	1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Erickson	1	0	1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Grixby	1	0	1	0-0	0-0	1	0	0
Miller	1	0	1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Shanle	0	0	0	0-0	0-0	1	0	0

	No	Yds	TD	Lg
Octavien	1	5	0	5
Total	1	5	0	5

INJURED

Players missing the Spring Game because of injuries included: Brandon Jackson, RB; Stewart Bradley, LB; Nick Covey, LB; Kurt Mann, C; Bo Ruud, LB; Jordan Picou, OL; Newton Lingenfelter, OL; Tony Sullivan, DE.

WHITE

	No	Gain	Lost	Net	Avg	TD	Lg
Davis	3	16	12	4	1.3	0	16
Jackson	3	4	0	4	1.3	0	4
Lawson	3	3	3	0	0.0	0	2
Ganz	3	0	18	-18	-6.0	0	0
Total	12	23	33	-10	-0.8	0	16

	Att	Comp	%	Int	Yds	TD	Lg
Ganz	13	4	30.8	0	14	0	6
Davis	6	0	0.0	1	0	0	0
Total	19	4	21.1	1	14	0	6

	No	Yds	TD	Lg
Tomerlin	1	6	0	6
L. Jackson	1	4	0	4
Lawson	1	2	0	2
Spain	1	2	0	2
Total	4	14	0	6

	No	Yds	TD	Lg
Total	0	0	0	0

	No	Yds	TD	Lg
Brothers	3	132	1	100
L. Jackson	1	30	0	30
Total	2	23	0	14

	No	Avg	Lg	Blk	TB	FC	50+	In	20
Kester	2	48.0	50	0	0	2	1	0	0
Alegria	2	38.0	44	0	0	2	0	0	0
Wesch	3	38.0	44	0	0	3	0	2	2
Total	7	40.9	50	0	0	7	1	0	2

	Made	Att	Lg	Blkd
Total	0	0	0	0

	Solo	Asst	Tot	TFL	Sack	PD	FF	FR
Eisenhart	4	5	9	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Kadavy	3	6	9	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Dillard	4	4	8	1-3	0-0	0	0	0
LeFlore	4	4	8	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Moore	1	4	5	0-0	0-0	1	0	0
Wortman	1	4	5	1-1	0-0	0	0	0
Brothers	2	2	4	0-0	0-0	1	0	0
Luhrs	1	3	4	1-5	1-5	0	0	0
Rigoni	2	2	4	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Steinkuhler	1	3	4	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
O'Hanlon	1	1	2	0-0	0-0	1	0	0
Poulosky	2	0	2	2-10	1-8	0	0	0
Rice	2	0	2	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Suh	0	2	2	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Adams	1	0	1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Blankenship	0	1	1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Brooks	0	1	1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Hardy	0	1	1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Hickman	0	1	1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Lawson	0	1	1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
McBride	0	1	1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Potter	1	0	1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Roark	0	1	1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Voges	0	1	1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0

	No	Yds	TD	Lg
Total	0	0	0	5

Filling Needs

Nebraska will look to add quarterback depth in the 2007 class

By Doug Horwich

Recruiting classes are often evaluated with a heavy emphasis on the overall caliber of the players signed. In reality, however, filling a team's needs is of almost equal importance.

In the last two classes signed by Husker head coach Bill Callahan, Nebraska did a nice job overall of addressing the team's personnel needs. However, a number of deficiencies must be addressed in the 2007 class, and the quarterback position, which the staff failed to address successfully in last year's class, has become a position of substantial urgency.

Because there are so many variables that dictate how many players a team can sign in a given recruiting class, it's extremely difficult to gauge the total size of the 2007 Husker recruiting class. In all likelihood, however, the total number will be more than 20.

The following is an approximate breakdown of how Nebraska's 2007 recruiting class is likely to be filled:

Quarterback

Estimated Number of Recruits: 2

Nebraska's coaching staff thought they had the quarterback position firmed up last summer when standout

recruit Josh Freeman gave the Huskers an early pledge. However, Freeman eventually had a change of heart in December and signed with Big 12 rival Kansas State. The late switch left the Husker staff scrambling to find a suitable replacement, which ultimately failed to materialize.

The result of Nebraska's inability to sign a quarterback in the 2006 recruiting class has made the position one of extreme urgency in the 2007 class. Though the Huskers have already lost out on some of their top targets, a number of interested prospects are still in the mix. In all likelihood, Nebraska will sign two quarterbacks in this recruiting class.

I-Back

Estimated Number of Recruits: 1

After signing three backs in the 2005 recruiting class, Nebraska signed only one running back in the 2006 class — junior college transfer Kenny Wilson. The Husker staff will look to take another running back in the 2007 class from the high school ranks and will target the nation's elite prospects. If Nebraska is unable to obtain a commitment from one of its top prospects, the staff may elect to pass on the position in this recruiting class.

Fullback

Estimated Number of Recruits: 0-1

Nebraska may or may not elect to sign a fullback/H-back in this recruiting class. With walk-on Justin Makovicka joining the team from last year's recruiting class, the position may again be addressed via the walk-on



Quarterback Jarrett Lee of Brenham, Texas, was one of the many recruits visiting for the Spring Game.

program or not at all.

Wide Receiver

Estimated Number of Recruits: 2-3

The Huskers signed an impressive group of receivers in last year's recruiting class, making wide receiver a posi-

RECRUITING NOTES

NU Targeting Wisconsin Duo

By Rick Shaw

The Nebraska coaching staff has scoured the country in search for top football talent for its recruiting class of 2007. As in past years, many of the players they've extended early scholarship offers to reside in the Midwest.

Husker coaches have found two gems in the state of Wisconsin that they hope to lure to Lincoln. Both prospects seem to be giving Nebraska long, hard looks.

● Josh Oglesby, a 6-foot-7, 315-pound offensive lineman from Milwaukee, Wis. (Saint Francis), may very well be the top prep offensive tackle prospect in the country heading into the 2006 season. A member of the pre-evaluation Rivals100 for 2007, Oglesby already claims scholarship offers from LSU, Florida, Florida State, USC, Michigan, Nebraska, Ohio State, Tennessee and others.

The big man from Wisconsin admits that he's interested in seeing more of what Nebraska has to offer.

"The staff at Nebraska is so amazing," Oglesby said. "Coach (Bill) Callahan and coach (Kevin) Cosgrove came to my school this past winter and made their offer to me. After I received it, I got a handwritten letter from every coach on the staff, which was great. It was almost like they were sending me a handwritten book, and that spoke nothing but class to me. It shows they're a real close knit group of coaches, and I like that.

"I just need to be able to get to all of the campuses to be certain that the decision I make is the right one. The trips will go a long ways toward telling me what I want to do because I sure don't want to rush into anything."

As a junior, the big tackle was named all-conference, all-area and all-state and was named to several all-America teams. He said he works hard to improve all areas of his game.

"I think I'm probably more of a run-blocking tackle if the truth were known, but I try hard to improve my pass protection skills, too."

● Nebraska coaches also are coveting another Wisconsin high school play-maker in running back John Clay. The 6-2, 220-pound athlete from Racine (Park), was named the state's player of the year in 2005 after rushing for 2,032 yards and 30 touchdowns.

Though he possesses breakaway speed (4.5-second 40-yard dash), Clay prides himself on his ability to gain the tough yards between the tackles.

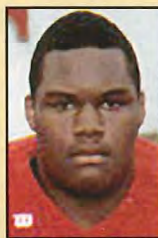
"Jim Brown was a punishing running back," Clay said. "That's what I try to do, punish them or outrun them."

Another member of the pre-evaluation Rivals100 for 2007, Clay already claims offers from Nebraska, Wisconsin and Iowa and is getting strong interest from Michigan, Ohio State, Miami, USC, Auburn and others.

"I've talked to more than a few schools who have told me that John's the best running back in the country," Park head coach Dennis Thompson said.

Thompson said that his prize running back isn't anywhere close to being ready to make a college decision.

"I know Wisconsin wants him real bad, and the rest of the Big Ten is trying to steal him away, but they have a lot more to worry about than just Wisconsin. Everybody wants this kid." ■



Josh Oglesby

tion of limited need for 2007. It's still likely that 2-3 receivers will be targeted for this class, but with four receivers joining the team in the fall from the 2006 class, the position will not be one of particular emphasis this year.

Tight End

Estimated Number of Recruits: 1-2

Nebraska signed only one tight end in the 2006 class in Missouri prospect Mike McNeill. It's likely that the Husker coaching staff will want to see what they have in McNeill before slotting a specific number of players for the tight end position. With freshman David Harvey and sophomore Justin Tomerlin also in the mix, tight end is not a position of urgency, but Nebraska will still look to take 1-2 recruits in this class.

Offensive Line

Estimated Number of Recruits: 2-3

After a massive haul in last year's recruiting class, Nebraska's urgent needs at all three offensive line positions have been alleviated. However, the Huskers will still look to sign 2-3 linemen in the 2007 class. With seniors Greg Austin and Kurt Mann graduating after this season, a center prospect is almost certain to be one of the linemen signed.

Defensive Tackle

Estimated Number of Recruits: 2-3

Nebraska's coaching staff hoped to sign at least three defensive tackles in the 2006 recruiting class but only managed to sign two, one of which is a junior college transfer. The position is therefore one that will receive a great deal of emphasis in this class, especially in light of the fact that the team's two starters this season are seniors.

The Husker staff has worked for two seasons now to shore up depth on the interior defensive line, but has more often than not been forced to go the junior college route to find players. In all likelihood, at least one JUCO defensive tackle will be signed in the 2007 class as well.

Defensive End

Estimated Number of Recruits: 2-3

Top pass rushers are always in high demand and short supply. The Husker staff scored big in 2005 with

Tennessee standout Barry Turner and hope that they signed a similar player in 2006 recruit Pierre Allen. With two starting ends graduating after this season, defensive end is a position that will have to be bolstered via the 2007 recruiting class, and it's likely that 2-3 prospects will be a part of the class this year.

Linebacker

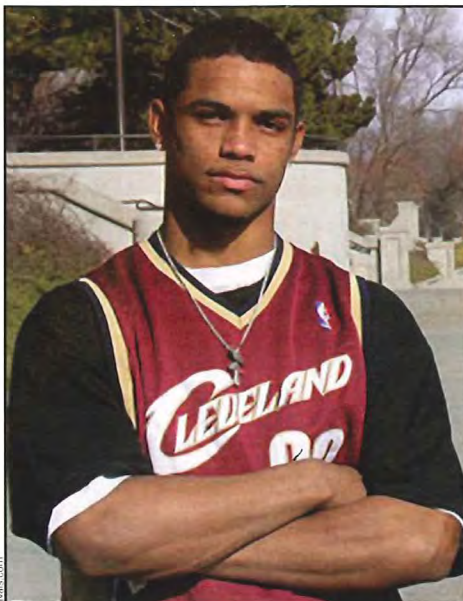
Estimated Number of Recruits: 2

Nebraska signed only one linebacker in the 2006 class in junior college transfer Steve Allen. However, the position will receive more attention this year. Nevertheless, the Huskers have outstanding depth at all three linebacker positions right now, and it's unlikely that more than two linebackers will be signed in the 2007 class.

Safety

Estimated Number of Recruits: 2

The Huskers managed to sign four players in the 2006 recruiting class capable of playing the safety positions. Depending on how many of those players actually end up playing safety, as well as how those players look this fall, Nebraska will then be able to determine how many safeties will be signed in the 2007 class. That number could



Omaha North wide receiver/safety Niles Paul was the first commitment to the 2007 class.

be as low as one and not likely to exceed two.

Cornerback

Estimated Number of Recruits: 2-3

Nebraska signed one designated cornerback in last year's recruiting class in junior college transfer Andre Jones, as well as two others capable of playing cornerback in high school recruits Anthony West and Ricky Thenarse. However, the Husker staff will likely look to sign an additional 2-3 cornerbacks in the 2007 class, as senior starter Zack Bowman will be graduating after this season, and the team's depth at the position is already a bit thin.

Place-Kicker

Estimated Number of Recruits: 0-1

Nebraska is in fairly good shape at place-kicker with sophomore Jordan Congdon. Whether or not the team signs a kicker in the 2007 class may depend more on the development of redshirt freshman walk-on Jordan Alegria. If Alegria shows the ability to be a solid replacement for Congdon, then the Husker staff may elect to pass on recruiting kickers this year. If not, they'll likely sign one. ■

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Happy Place

Pitching mound 'probably the next best thing to being in heaven' for Nebraska ace

By Mike Babcock

Memorable scene from the movie "Field of Dreams": "Is this heaven?" Shoeless Joe

Jackson asks.

"No," Ray Kinsella replies, "it's Iowa."

Well, this isn't Iowa we're talking about here, either. It's a pitching mound. But as far as Nebraska's Joba Chamberlain is concerned it's "probably the next best thing to being in heaven."

Chamberlain stood near the third base line at Hawks Field on a cool night in late March, looking at the mound and discussing his pitching career. His audience was a reporter and a sports information assistant. Everyone else had headed down the left-field line to the clubhouse.

The field was clear, the grass green for the most part.

Chamberlain seemed not to notice the chill, despite a breeze that served as a reminder, as if constantly tapping him on the shoulder. The

reporter took no notes, relying on a tape recorder.

The mound is "a place I feel free and a place I have more confidence than I'll ever have in myself anywhere else, just because I've worked so hard to be good," said Chamberlain.

Most Cornhusker fans know his story by now. But repetition, perhaps, can make it more plausible, less like a movie script carefully crafted to facilitate one's suspension of disbelief. Repetition can serve as a reminder that yes, Chamberlain really did take this path to the mound at Hawks Field.

Two years ago, he was pitching from a mound in Kearney, Neb., for NCAA Division II Nebraska-Kearney. And he was enjoying himself. "It was a great experience," he said.

Nebraska-Kearney was his real-world escape. Following graduation from Lincoln (Neb.) Northeast High School, he worked for the city maintenance department, cleaning rest-



Joba Chamberlain finished 10-2 with a 2.74 earned-run average in his first season as a Husker.

rooms and tending baseball fields in city parks, eight hours a day. He wasn't ready for such a routine.

He enrolled at Nebraska-Kearney in January. His record for the Lopers that spring was 3-6, his earned-run average 5.23, nothing "you should be bragging about," he said.



run average in 2005, earning first-team All-Big 12

The mound is "a place I feel free and a place I have more confidence than I'll ever have in myself anywhere else, just because I've worked so hard to be good."

— Pitcher Joba Chamberlain

Childress was impressed with the 90-mph velocity on his fastball, having observed it first-hand at a baseball camp. So Nebraska assistants Andy Sawyers and Will Bolt showed up to watch him pitch for the Beatrice Bruins during the summer following his freshman season at Nebraska-Kearney.

Sawyers and Bolt stayed for only a couple of innings. When they left, "I was like, 'Oh man, I don't know if that's a good thing,'" said Chamberlain, who knew why they had been there.

Word had gotten around. "Nebraska is looking at you."

Childress also watched him pitch for the Bruins, but couldn't talk about a transfer because Chamberlain had yet to get a release from Nebraska-Kearney coach Damon Day.

The release was granted late in the summer, after which Childress visited him and arranged a tour of the university. Although Chamberlain had grown up in Lincoln, he had never been on campus. And, more to the point, he questioned whether he was ready to pitch at the Division I level.

His decision came after sleeping on it, literally. He woke up, looked at his dad and said, "You know, we're got to do this. I don't want to look back and say I wish I would have done it."

That he said "we" was significant. His dad, Harlan, has been with him every step of the way, from the first time he picked up a baseball to play

catch. The two are emotionally inseparable.

Harlan Chamberlain is a survivor, moving about in a motorized scooter because he contracted polio as a child, on the Winnebago Indian Reservation in northeast Nebraska. Whatever he has accomplished starts with his dad "instilling that 'You can do whatever you set your mind to,'" said Joba, who always knew his dad had confidence in him. But "it lies deep down, and you have to find it in yourself." Based on his numbers at Nebraska-Kearney it appeared that might take some time. But he found it immediately at Nebraska. In his second start, against New Mexico, he pitched seven innings, allowing two hits and striking out 15, without giving up a walk. Welcome to Division I.

He finished with a 10-2 record and 2.74 ERA to earn first-team All-Big 12 recognition and third-team All-America honors. Two of his victories came in the NCAA Tournament. He allowed one run and struck out 13 in eight innings against Miami in the Super-Regional at Lincoln, then allowed three runs in seven innings against Arizona State in the Cornhuskers' first-ever College World Series victory.

Growing up, Chamberlain's baseball dreams were more about hitting than about pitching, smashing game-winning home runs. He didn't pitch until his junior year in high school, and he didn't focus on pitching until his senior year. "Things have evolved

"I thought I'd be there, do what I do, get my degree and go on with my life."

He could have been content with that. He was playing baseball for love of the game not for where it could take him. Enter Rob Childress, the former Cornhusker pitching coach.

very quickly," he said.

He did some hitting at Nebraska-Kearney, and he can still "swing it," he said. But now "I leave that hitting stuff to these other guys. The ball is coming in a little bit too fast for me."

Even so, "you never lose that feeling of wanting to hit."

Having been a hitter, and a good one — he batted .505 with 11 home runs during his final American Legion season — helps him pitch by understanding how a hitter might think. However, batters have little time to think when trying to hit his fastball, which is consistently clocked in the mid-90s.

Chamberlain has the look of a power pitcher, at 6-foot-3 and 225 pounds. He has transformed himself physically, dropping 20 pounds, and more importantly losing body fat, from a year ago. The weight loss has "gone in stages," he said. He weighed as much as 260 pounds as a high school junior.

The pressure has been unavoidably greater this season, as a result of what he has accomplished. Collegiate Baseball included him on its pre-season All-America first team, and major

league scouts are always on-hand to chart his pitches. He has the look of a first-round Major League draft pick, something only one other Cornhusker pitcher has been. Alvie Shepherd was a first-round pick in 1995.

Chamberlain struggled with his control early in the Big 12 season. After missing a start against Alabama in early March because of soreness in his right biceps, he came back strong in the conference-opener against Kansas in Lincoln. But the next week, he walked four and allowed five earned runs in 2 2/3 innings of a loss at Kansas State, the shortest outing of his Cornhusker career.

The control problems continued a week later at Missouri, but he battled through six innings to earn credit for the victory. Then he returned to dominating form against Texas A&M — and his former coach, Childress. In 6 1/3 innings, he allowed four hits and one run, walking three and striking out 11.

"It wasn't a whole lot of fun watching him in the other dugout," Childress said.

Chamberlain's maintenance department experience immediately

after high school provided an appreciation for those who work 8-to-5 jobs, but "that's not fun," he said.

"So hopefully I can ride this right arm out as long as I can."

All indications are, the ride will last a while.

"I'm truly blessed to be in this situation and to play for a program like this, to put the 'N' on my hat. Sometimes, I've got to pinch myself to realize the things that I've done," he said.

"It's just so nice to be able to be around the game and to know the people I've met."

Though pitching is a solitary activity, Chamberlain is hardly alone on the mound. He has "nine of my best friends around me, loving me, going to dive and make plays for me," he said.

"And not only do I have them but I've got 25 other guys loving me and cheering me on. There's no better feeling than to have those 3 hours of going all out, leaving it all on the field."

The mound isn't heaven. But he might have seen glimpses from there. ■

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10 QUESTIONS

with **RYAN WEHRLE**

**6-3/205 So. Shortstop
Papillion, Neb.**

The change in Ryan Wehrle has been dramatic, off the field as well as on.
"He had some issues as a freshman, and just like any other human being, if you can put those aside and start working toward the positive, good things will happen," coach Mike Anderson said.

"Sometimes it takes a jolt to have that happen. 'Hey, I'm not moving in the right direction. Let me start moving in the right direction.' And all of a sudden, you start to get results."

That's what has happened for Wehrle, who has had the difficult task of replacing two-time All-Big 12 shortstop Joe Simokaitis. But he has handled it as easily as he handles sharply hit ground balls in the hole. He's hitting as well as fielding. He was named the Big 12 player of the week for March 28 to April 3, hitting .591 with six runs scored, four stolen bases, a home run and four RBIs in five games.

Wehrle, who was hitting .375 in mid-April, has matured on and off the field. The adjustment from high school to the major college level "kind of catches you by surprise," he said.

"It was big, but you don't realize it until you get here."

He started slowly but finished strong, hitting .275 and earning all-conference honorable mention at second base. Though he was comfortable at second by season's end, he welcomed the return to shortstop. "That's my natural position," he said. "I've been playing it since . . . I don't know how long."

The first practice back at shortstop "felt as comfortable as the first day I was there."

His confidence was bolstered in the late summer, playing for the Beatrice Bruins. In 15 games with the Bruins, who finished ninth at the NBC World Series, he hit .364 with 10 RBIs.

"My confidence rose, and I think it's showing," he said.

Beyond that, he has resolved the off-field issues to which Anderson referred. "We all make mistakes," said Anderson. "We've got kids in this program who make mistakes all the time."

In such situations, a coach's support can be as important as the discipline he administers.

"I'm going to tell you this, some of those kids who have gone through that are the most loyal, unbelievable kids, who will do anything for you," Anderson said. "It's one of the greatest feelings in the world; if you look at them, they go, 'I'm with you.' And I know I'm with them."

"It's a great feeling, an incredible feeling."

What's the best movie you've ever seen?

"I'm going to go, let me see, I like the new 'Glory Road,' the basketball one. And I like 'Bull Durham.' Do I watch them more than once? Not really. I wait 'til they come out on video."

If you could excel at any sport except baseball, what sport would it be?

"Basketball, I played it all the way up to my senior year in



high school, so that would be it . . . a 3-point shooter. I tried to be."

What's the best thing served at the training table?

"Meatball sandwiches, with just parmesan cheese. And the taco salad is pretty good."

When you go on the road, what's the best way to kill time on the bus rides?

"Watching movies, guys watch movies. Our coaches usually have stacks of them so you get to choose what you want to watch. There are like six screens on the bus. Either that or sleep."

If a movie was made of your life, who would you pick to play the part of you?

"Probably Kevin Costner, he's a big baseball guy."

What's the most embarrassing thing that's ever happened to you on a baseball field?

"Probably catching a ground ball in the eye off the bat of Andy Gerch, my junior year in high school. It took a bad bounce and hit me right in the eye. Andy mentions it every once in a while, kind of rubs it in."

Whose signature was on the first baseball glove you ever owned?

"Ryan Sandburg, I had that up until I was about 10. I was a Sandburg fan, him and Cal Ripken Jr. My dad got it for me when I was real young; I don't know, 5 or so."

Bungee jumping, hang gliding or rock climbing?

"Bungee jumping, just for the thrill you get, the rush, I guess, the excitement. I've never done any of them."

If you had a CD player but only three CDs to play, what three would they be?

"I'd go with the Steve Miller Band, Tupac and Jason Boland, not necessarily in that order. It could be any order. Jason Boland is a country guy from Texas."

If you could eat only one thing for a month, what would you pick?

"I'd take good prime rib. They serve that at the training table every once in a while, not regularly, though. But every once in a while they'll get it out there." ■

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Keen Interest

***Ex-Husker Dobbs
enjoys watching
players he
worked with***

By Mike Babcock

If you're looking for Mike Dobbs, and the Nebraska baseball team is at home, you'll likely find him at Hawks Field, watching the Cornhuskers. He has season tickets and rarely misses a game.

You'll also likely find him paying particular attention to Jeff Christy and Joba Chamberlain, and smiling. He coached Christy at Lincoln's Southeast High School as well as during the summer American Legion season. And he worked with Chamberlain at baseball camps in the city.

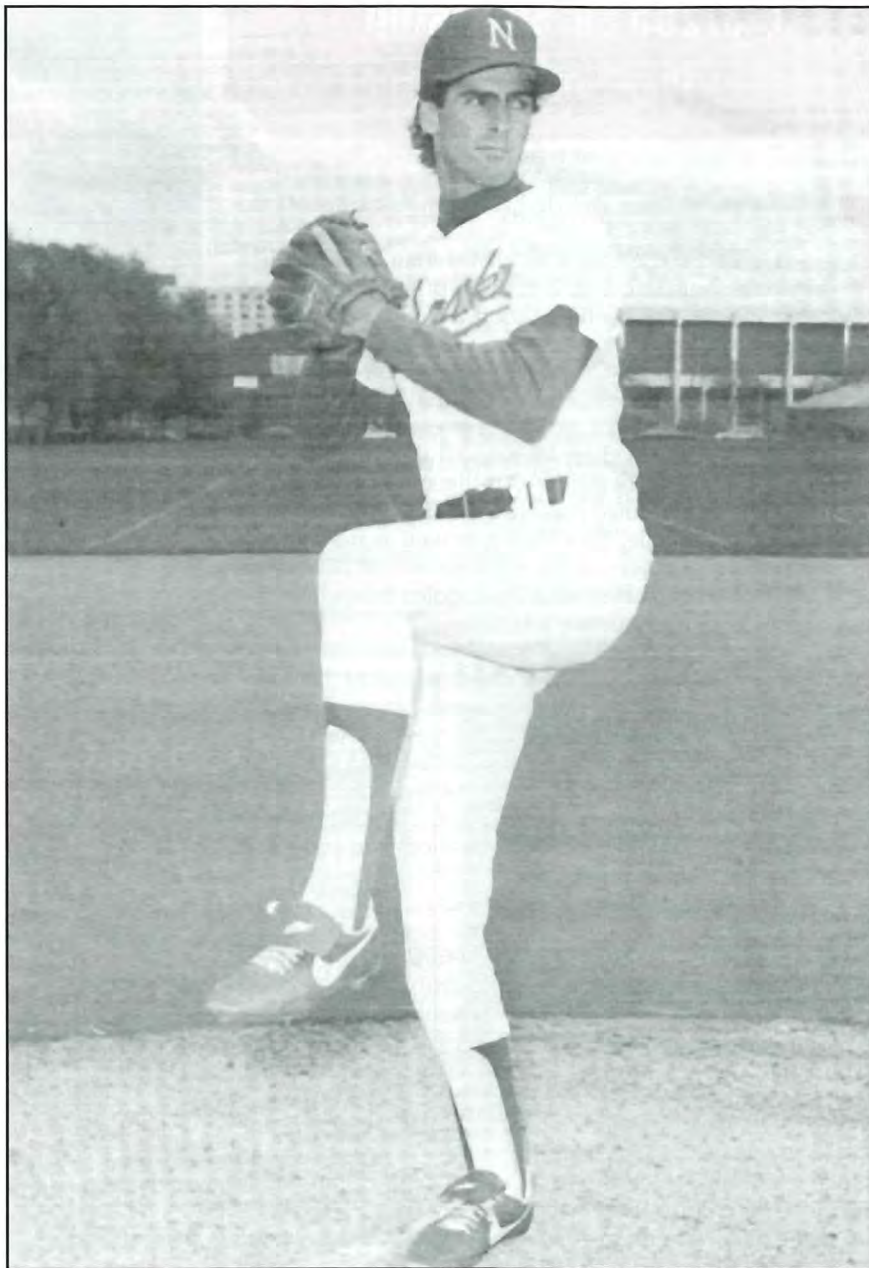
He also remembers a young Chamberlain enthusiastically shagging foul balls during Legion games at Lincoln's Sherman Field. Chamberlain, by his own admission, was pudgy back then, which is why "I always thought he'd be a good catcher someday," Dobbs said with a laugh.

Now he's out there pitching for the Huskers in front of 8,000."

Dobbs pitched for Nebraska from 1983 to 1986, but in front of considerably smaller crowds. The Cornhuskers might attract 500 to Buck Beltzer Field then, on a nice day.

About the only time they played in front of large crowds was during the Big Eight Tournament in Oklahoma City.

But even if Buck Beltzer could have accommodated that many, "I couldn't envision a regular-season home game, or series, with 8,000



Mike Dobbs finished 6-1 as a junior and led the Huskers with a 4.38 ERA.

fans," he said. "We would have big crowds at (Omaha's) Rosenblatt Stadium against Creighton — 5,000, that was a big crowd for us."

Dobbs pitched in front of an audience of about 3,500 at Stanford's Sunken Diamond in late May of his junior season at Nebraska. He got the start when the Cornhuskers played

Stanford, which was ranked second in the nation, in the winners' bracket of the NCAA Western I Regional.

Pepperdine, ranked ninth, was so certain it would be playing in the second-round game that it saved Scott Marrett, the West Coast Athletic Conference "Pitcher of the Year," for Stanford.

Nebraska upset Pepperdine, sans Marrett, in the first round, 4-2.

Dobbs was matched against Stanford's Jack McDowell, who would pitch for 12 seasons in the major leagues. Neither would survive the seventh inning nor be involved in the decision.

But Dobbs would have made it to the eighth if not for a two-out error that led to three runs and a short-lived 7-5 deficit. The Cornhuskers responded with three runs in the top of the eighth.

Nebraska took the 8-7 lead into the bottom of the ninth inning.

"We had them on the ropes," said Dobbs.

But Stanford fashioned two runs from two walks, a sacrifice and a single, with the winning run scoring when the Cardinal base runner knocked the ball free at home plate.

The Cornhuskers would lose a rematch with Pepperdine the next day, 7-6, for a frustrating finish to a 45-24 season. But "we were right there with the best teams in the country," Dobbs said.

"Boys from Nebraska, competing against the best California had."

Dobbs was from East High in Lincoln. Counting him, six Cornhusker starters that day were from in state: catcher Bill McGuire (Omaha), outfielders Paul Meyers (Omaha) and Rich King (Millard), second baseman Kurt Eubanks (Lincoln) and designated hitter Mark Kister (Hastings).

Dobbs pitched in Nebraska's starting rotation his final two seasons. He posted his best numbers as a junior, leading the team in earned-run average (4.38) with a 6-1 record.

After finishing a degree, he taught in both elementary and high school and coached, basketball as well as baseball, for 11 years at Southeast High, where he coached former Cornhusker Alex Gordon.

As a high school freshman, Gordon played for the junior varsity, coached by Dobbs, and that summer, he played for the American Legion Juniors, also coached by Dobbs.

Typically the Juniors team included high school juniors and seniors. Southeast was among the state's largest high schools, and "for a freshman to make the Legion (Juniors) team was rare. That didn't happen

very often. There was a lot of competition, a lot of kids to choose from," said Dobbs.

Gordon "had to be pretty special." Special or not, Dobbs didn't want to overwhelm him.

So "I told him I was going to hide him in the bottom of the order, the seven- or eight-hole, just to give him some confidence, see a lot of fastballs, good pitches to hit. 'I don't want you to lose confidence right away, see a bunch of breaking balls from varsity-type pitching,'" Dobbs said.

Gordon spent only a couple of weeks near the bottom of the batting order before moving up to the second spot. He was "probably our second- or third-leading hitter that summer."

Dobbs left Southeast High School "about seven years ago" to enter private business. He sells playground equipment for Crouch Recreation. And yes, the company is owned by former Cornhusker football player and 2001 Heisman Trophy winner Eric Crouch, who bought the company from Jeff Churchich, Dobbs' teammate and roommate for a year at Nebraska.

"I miss the coaching a lot, the ability to teach kids and watch them develop," said Dobbs. Like Christy and Gordon, who is little more than a line drive or two away from the big leagues.

"Just to see those young kids develop as a 15-year-old and then four, five, six years later they're signing pro contracts, it's a neat story, a neat deal," Dobbs said.

Now, however, he has time to watch daughters Taylor (13) and Megan (7) compete in volleyball, swimming and soccer. And he's a good spectator, he said. "I sit back and I don't say a word. I've been on the other end of it too long, and I know it's not going to make any difference anyway.

"So I just sit back, take it all in and let the other parents yell."

He also has more time to take in Cornhusker games at Hawks Field. He was on-hand for their series sweep of Texas A&M in mid-April, all three games. The series drew more than 24,000.

"Unbelievable," he said. "I would have never dreamed this." ■

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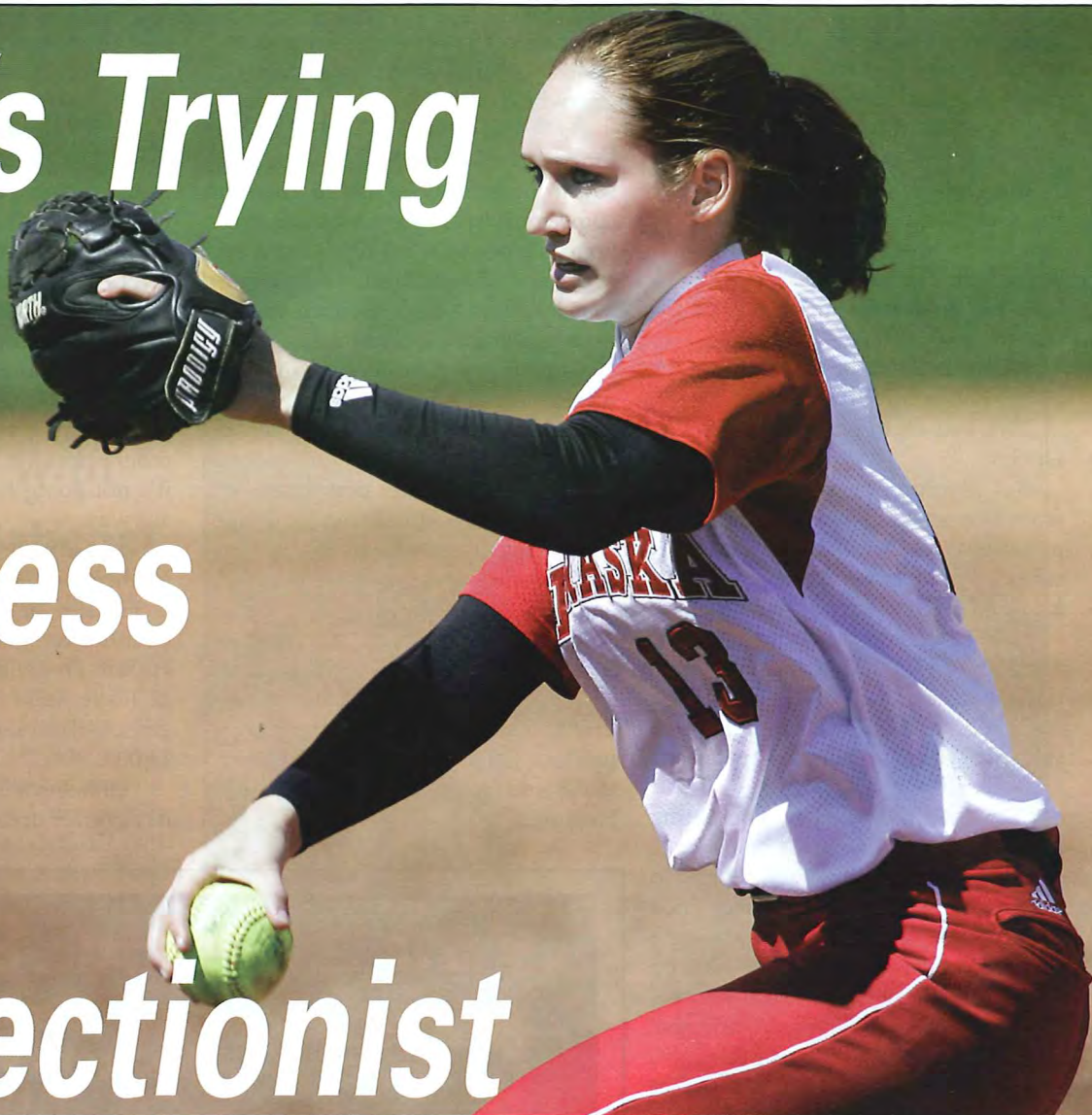
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She's Trying To Be Less Of A Perfectionist



At the midpoint of the Big 12 regular season, freshman Molly Hill was 17-1 — the best start by a Nebraska freshman in 20 years.

Freshman pitcher Hill adjusting to college game after dominating prep career

By Todd Henrichs

The first time that a college hitter jacked a home run off Molly Hill this season, Nebraska softball coach Rhonda Revelle remembers the eyes of her freshman pitcher getting real big.

Pitching in college is not an easy adjustment when you're accustomed

to perfection.

Hill's arrival at Nebraska comes on the heels of the most dominating pitching career in the state's prep annals. As a junior at Wayne High School, Hill tossed 222 innings without allowing an earned run. Her senior year, she faced 726 batters, allowing just 22 hits (.030) and 19 walks.

A scrapbook of her high school career included highlights from 28 no-hitters, 50 shutouts, 10 perfect games and three games where she struck out all 21 hitters she faced.

"In high school, I had goals like giving up no earned runs or a small number of hits," Hill said. "I guess they were pretty strict when you think about it now.

"Here, I'm trying to be less of a perfectionist."

Nowadays, Hill walks to the pitcher's circle knowing that she's not facing high school hitters anymore. But that doesn't mean she's any less competitive — or having much less success.

At the midpoint of the Big 12 regular season, Hill was 17-1 — the best

start by a Nebraska freshman in 20 years. Most impressive has been her consistency. She allowed two or fewer runs in 17 of her first 21 collegiate starts.

In her debut, Hill tossed a complete game in NU's 8-2 win against Oregon State. The Beavers, who climbed as high as sixth in the NFCA coaches' top 25, won their next 28 straight.

"With Molly, there's going to be some growing pains," Revelle said. "But she's a player that just can't get enough. I don't know if she ever turns it off.

"She'll go out and throw, or she'll go out and do defensive work, or she'll do spin work, or she'll work through her situations in her mind. That gives a coach confidence. If something happens and she doesn't have a good outing, it's not from not having done everything possible."

With Hill, Nebraska has a two-person staff to rival many of the best in the country. Junior Ashley DeBuhr, who tossed nearly 300 innings in carrying the load for the Huskers a year ago, got off to a 15-6 start this season

while ranking among the Big 12 leaders in strikeouts.

At 32-7, Nebraska was on pace for one of its best seasons in school history. Pitching has been key.

"When you think of Ashley DeBuhr, you think of a wicked, wicked, wicked curveball," Revelle said. "And she changes speeds with the best of them.

"When you think of a Molly Hill, you think about establishing the inside part of the plate first and foremost. Molly throws a little bit harder; Ashley has a little bit more movement. Again, you can play to each strength."

Hill first remembers working with a pitching coach when she was 12, about the time that Revelle first heard of the pitching prospect.

Mike Smith, a Nebraska native now living in California, would see Hill only a few times each year. But with the help of her father, Kevin, Hill would try to remember everything Smith said. As she grew older, the family would watch Women's College World Series games on television and analyze the spin created by

each pitcher.

Hill watched closely what All-American Peaches James did at Nebraska. And even today, she says she's learning every day working alongside DeBuhr.


"The great thing is she doesn't want us to sugarcoat anything," Revelle said. "She wants to be coached."

Hill showed immediate promise last fall with solid exhibition outings against defending national champion Michigan and the Canadian National Team. Since then, she's focused on her consistency and on a plan for working wisely, but aggressively, against college hitters.

That work-ethic, Revelle believes, is what will carry Hill to even greater heights as a pitcher.







"What was the slam dunk for me is hearing she grew up throwing in a barn without heat," Revelle said. "If that doesn't say Nebraska, I don't know what does." ■





Todd Henrichs covers the Nebraska softball team for the Lincoln Journal Star. He can be reached at 473-7439 or thenrichs@journalstar.com



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Showing Signs

Pederson, Boehm say basketball program shows improvement

Despite rampant speculation to the contrary, Barry Collier remains the Nebraska men's basketball coach. On the day the Cornhuskers received a bid from the National Invitation Tournament, Athletic Director Steve Pederson and Executive Associate Athletic Director Marc Boehm issued a joint statement, announcing Collier would coach the Cornhuskers for a seventh season, citing signs of improvement in a season that concluded four days later with a 73-62 loss at Hofstra in the NIT's first round.

Nebraska finished with a 19-14 record, including 7-9 in the Big 12. The Cornhuskers started strong in conference play, winning five of their first eight games. But they faded down the stretch to finish sixth. Victories against Missouri (71-64) and Oklahoma (69-63) in the Big 12 Tournament earned them the NIT bid. They lost to Kansas, for a third time on the season, in the semifinals, 79-65.

Collier, whose contract has two years remaining, is 89-91 in six seasons.

The statement:

"In an overall view, finishing in the top half of the Big 12, being the No. 6 seed in the tournament, and winning 19 games represents significant improvement from a year ago. The missing ingredient now is an NCAA Tournament appearance.

"We have seen other signs that indicate improvement. The play of some young players is reason for optimism as they continued to improve throughout the season. We were also in full support of a difficult personnel decision (dismissing Joe McCray from the team) that Coach Collier had to



Barry Collier, whose contract has two years remaining, is 89-91 in six seasons as Nebraska's head coach

make during the season.

"The success in the Big 12 Tournament is quite possibly the

next step in turning the corner. We beat an excellent Oklahoma team, the No. 3 seed in the tournament



Seniors Jason Dourisseau (1), Bronsen Schliep(15) and Wes Wilkinson (11) celebrate as the Huskers knock off Oklahoma in the conference opener.

and a top 20 team, and did it in impressive fashion.

"Barry Collier is a fine man and excellent representative of the University of Nebraska. He does things the right way, he works hard, he has an excellent staff and his players' actions are in line with how we believe a program should be run.

"Do we have high goals for this program — absolutely. Do we believe this program can be a consistent NCAA Tournament team —

absolutely. Do we value people of high character and great work ethic — absolutely.

"This is not an easy conference to break into the top tier, and we don't want to stop Coach Collier and his team's progress when it appears to us we may be on the verge of that breakthrough. Our goals are to build something that will become consistently great. We believe Coach Collier should be given more time to achieve that goal." ■

MEN'S INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

	GP	GS	Min/G	FG%	3PT%	FT%	Reb/G	Ast	Stl	Blk	Pts/G
Wes Wilkinson	32	30	29.1	.435	.419	.825	6.2	45	26	61	11.9
Jason Dourisseau	33	33	30.5	.477	.250	.594	7.3	53	34	12	11.3
Aleks Maric	31	26	25.3	.472	.000	.611	8.1	38	25	39	10.9
Joe McCray	18	15	25.7	.347	.311	.706	3.7	20	25	4	9.8
Jamel White	33	13	25.7	.380	.299	.802	3.1	65	23	0	8.7
Marcus Walker	33	12	17.7	.380	.299	.653	1.1	74	13	0	5.6
B.J. Walker	27	7	15.4	.398	.000	.595	3.4	19	8	4	4.7
Charles Richardson	30	23	25.9	.363	.341	.836	2.6	100	34	0	4.4
Marcus Perry	32	1	11.8	.347	.360	.739	0.9	16	11	2	4.2
Kyle Marks	24	0	5.1	.500	.000	.714	0.9	3	4	3	1.0
Bronsen Schliep	31	4	5.6	.389	.000	.440	0.9	4	9	1	0.8
Jim Ledsome	17	0	3.6	.286	.000	.556	1.2	1	1	4	0.5
Tony Wilbrand	19	1	2.8	.364	.000	1.000	0.8	0	0	0	0.5
Paul Velandier	2	0	1.5	.000	.000	.000	0.0	1	0	0	0.0
Team							3.1				
Total	33			.410	.317	.670	38.3	439	213	130	66.7
Opponents	33			.411	.325	.655	33.0	454	259	126	66.1

MEN'S RESULTS

Overall: 19-14 (Home 14-5, Away 3-7, Neutral 2-2)

Conference: 7-9 (Home 4-4, Away 3-5)

Nov. 18	*Longwood, W 80-65
Nov. 19	*Yale, W 73-64
Nov. 20	*Louisiana Tech, W 59-56
Nov. 27	SE Missouri State, W 69-54
Nov. 30	Marquette, W 84-74
Dec. 3	Ala.-Birmingham, L 73-72
Dec. 8	South Dakota State, W 76-67
Dec. 11	@Creighton, L 70-44
Dec. 17	Chicago State, W 76-65
Dec. 19	North Carolina A&T, W 107-57
Dec. 21	Alabama A&M, W 67-60
Dec. 31	**Florida State, L 74-60
Jan. 3	Northern Colorado, W 60-50
Jan. 7	Oklahoma, W 59-58
Jan. 11	@Kansas State, W 57-42
Jan. 17	Iowa State, L 88-75
Jan. 21	@Kansas, L 96-54
Jan. 25	@Colorado, L 81-59
Jan. 28	Missouri, W 65-52
Jan. 31	@Oklahoma State, W 59-57
Feb. 4	Baylor, W 60-45
Feb. 8	Kansas, L 69-48
Feb. 11	@Texas, L 78-59
Feb. 15	@Iowa State, W 73-63
Feb. 18	Texas Tech, L 70-64
Feb. 22	Colorado, W 93-77
Feb. 25	@Texas A&M, L 66-55
March 1	Kansas State, L 66-64
March 5	@Missouri, L 64-63
March 9	***Missouri, W 71-64
March 10	***Oklahoma, W 69-63
March 11	***Kansas, L 79-65
March 16	****@Hofstra, L 73-62
	*John Thompson Classic, Lincoln, Neb.
	**Orange Bowl Classic, Miami, Fla.
	***Big 12 Tournament, Dallas, Texas
	****National Invitation Tournament

BASKETBALL NOTES

TEAM AWARDS

Seniors Jason Dourisseau and Wes Wilkinson were co-winners of the Jack Moore Award, presented to the most outstanding player on the men's basketball team. Wilkinson led the team in scoring, averaging 11.9 points, as well as averaging 6.2 rebounds. He also led the team in 3-point shots (62) and blocked shots (61). He finished his career in seventh place on the school's blocked shot list. Dourisseau also earned the award as the team's most outstanding defensive player for a second consecutive season.

Only four other players have won the defensive award, first given after the 1984-85 season, more than once: Tyronn Lue, Eric Piatkowski, Clifford Scales and Dave Hoppen.

Senior Tony Wilbrand received the outstanding attitude award, and freshman Kyle Marks earned the team's lifter of the year award. Marks increased his squat lift maximum by 100 pounds and his bench press maximum by 40 pounds. He also increased his vertical jump by 11 1/2 inches.

CONFERENCE AWARDS

Freshman Jamel White, sophomore Aleks Maric and senior Wes Wilkinson were Nebraska's representatives on All-Big 12 specialty teams selected by sportswriters who regularly cover the conference. White was included on the all-freshman and all-reserve teams. Wilkinson was on the all-underrated team. And Maric was chosen to the all-improved team.

ROSTER SUBTRACTIONS AND ADDITIONS

Junior forward B.J. Walker from Cincinnati, Ohio, and freshman guard Mike Smith from the Bronx, N.Y., will not return next season. Walker played in 27 games, including seven as a starter, averaging 4.7 points and 3.4 rebounds, while Smith sat out the season as a redshirt.

Collier did not elaborate on their departures, which leave Nebraska with one scholarship to fill, after Roburt Sallie and Kris Douse joined the 2006 recruiting class during the spring letter-of-intent-signing period. Sallie is a 6-foot-5, 190-pound guard from Sacramento, Calif., by way of Laurinburg (N.C.) Institute and The Patterson School in Lenoir, N.C., while Douse is a 6-7, 215-pound wing player from Toronto by way of Laurinburg and the IMG Academy in Bradenton, Fla.

Sallie and Douse were teammates of the Cornhuskers' Jamel White at Laurinburg.

Sallie, who signed with Washington out of high school, averaged 13 points, seven assists and four rebounds this season at The Patterson School, where he played for coach Chris Chaney, who coached him, Douse and White the previous season at perennial prep school power Laurinburg.

Douse averaged 13 points and 6.5 rebounds this season for the IMG Academy.

Sallie and Douse join Toni Soda and Ryan Anderson in Nebraska's recruiting class. Soda was Sallie's teammate at The Patterson School this past season.

YORI'S BEST YET

Coach Connie Yori's women's team finished strong, winning seven of its final 10 games, including two in the Women's National Invitation Tournament - the third consecutive season in which the Huskers have won a first-round game in the WNIT and the first time they've ever won twice in the post-season. Nebraska finished 19-13 overall, including 8-8 in the conference.

The Huskers' WNIT victories came against Drake (62-59) in Lincoln and at Wyoming (72-67). They lost at Kansas State (77-63). The



Senior Jason Dourisseau (top) won one team honor and shared another.

Wildcats went on to win the tournament.

The Huskers also won a game in the Big 12 Tournament for a second season in a row.

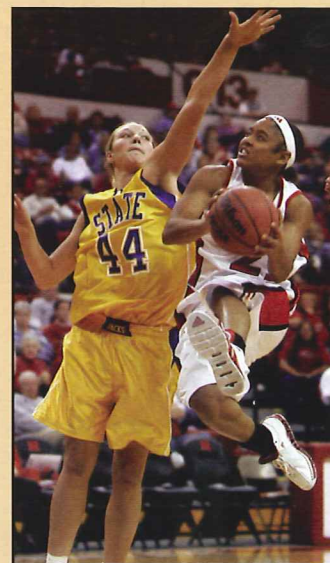
FIRST-TEAM ALL-BIG 12, AGAIN

Junior guard Kiera Hardy earned first-team all-conference honors for a second consecutive season, averaging 17.5 points, 3.1 rebounds, 3.2 assists and 1.8 steals. She ranked second in the conference with 81 3-point shots, shattering Nebraska's single-season record for a junior.

Only two players in school history have earned first-team all-conference recognition in three consecutive seasons: Karen Jennings and Maurice Ivy.

Hardy already holds the school career record for 3-point shot and ranks in the top 10 in career scoring, with a chance to become the third Husker to score 2,000 points.

Freshman Kelsey Griffin from Eagle River, Alaska, was named to the Big 12 coaches' all-rookie team after averaging 13.3 points and a team-high 6.0 rebounds. She set a school freshman record by making 121 free throws in 174 attempts. The Dallas Morning News named her conference "Freshman of the Year."



Junior Kiera Hardy (right) earned her second all-conference honor.

GOOD-BYE GERHART

Junior forward Jessica Gerhart, the team's third-leading scorer, won't be returning for her final season. The two-time, first-team Academic All-Big 12 honoree from Fenton, Iowa, plans to enter chiropractic school after graduating in three years. She started every game this season, averaging 9.1 points and 3.4 rebounds.

SOLID ATTENDANCE

The Huskers ranked in the top 30 nationally in home attendance, averaging 3,316. The season's largest attendance was 7,114 on Jan. 7, 2006, when they defeated Kansas 73-61. They drew 6,143 for a game against No. 24-ranked Texas A&M at the Sports Center. The Aggies won 69-50. ■



Connie Yori



The Huskers celebrate after knocking off Kansas State 64-62 in overtime Feb. 18 at the Bob Devaney Sports Center.

WOMEN'S RESULTS

Overall: 19-13 (Home 11-4,
Away 6-7, Neutral 2-2)

Conference: 8-8 (Home 5-3, Away 3-5)

Nov. 19 South Dakota State, L 68-49
Nov. 21 Creighton, W 84-50
Nov. 25 *LSU, L 74-55
Nov. 27 *TAMU-Corp. Christi, W 76-64
Dec. 3 @Minnesota, L 78-70
Dec. 7 Texas Southern, W 93-68
Dec. 10 @Northwestern, W 80-50
Dec. 17 @Michigan, W 69-49
Dec. 20 Texas State, W 96-47
Dec. 29 Grambling State, W 69-40
Dec. 31 Northern Arizona, W 70-56
Jan. 4 @Colorado, W 80-62
Jan. 7 Kansas, W 73-61
Jan. 11 Missouri, L 64-58
Jan. 14 @Iowa State, L 79-57
Jan. 18 Texas, L 70-62
Jan. 21 @Texas Tech, L 61-59
Jan. 28 Colorado, W 70-54
Feb. 1 Iowa State, W 54-42
Feb. 4 @Kansas State, L 71-64
Feb. 8 @Baylor, L 91-69
Feb. 11 Texas A&M, L 69-50
Feb. 15 @Kansas, W 60-57
Feb. 18 Kansas State, W 64-62 (ot)
Feb. 21 Oklahoma State, W 81-56
Feb. 26 @Oklahoma, L 73-45
March 1 @Missouri, W 75-62
March 7 **Colorado, W 67-59
March 8 **Texas A&M, L 73-64
March 16 ***Drake, W 62-59
March 22 ***@Wyoming, W 72-67
March 24 ***@Kansas State, L 77-63
*Miami Thanksgiving Classic, Miami, Fla.
**Big 12 Tournament, Dallas, Texas
***National Invitation Tournament

WOMEN'S INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

	GP	GS	Min/G	FG%	3PT%	FT%	Reb/G	Ast	Stl	Blk	Pts/G
Kiera Hardy	32	32	30.0	.395	.362	.786	3.1	101	49	0	17.5
Kelsey Griffin	32	32	24.8	.541	.250	.695	6.0	28	40	24	13.3
Jessica Gerhart	32	32	23.3	.462	.176	.840	3.4	14	22	5	9.1
Chelsea Aubry	32	32	27.2	.427	.351	.743	4.4	33	21	6	6.2
TK LaFleur	32	0	16.7	.374	.323	.619	1.9	27	15	3	5.4
Elena Diaz	32	0	16.2	.479	.000	.571	2.8	10	31	8	4.6
Danielle Page	32	0	15.6	.368	.000	.738	3.6	9	22	38	4.3
LaToya Howell	32	31	27.9	.273	.233	.761	3.4	159	53	1	4.1
Sarah White	32	0	6.8	.462	.556	.733	0.9	7	10	1	2.1
Ashley Ford	32	1	11.4	.346	.250	.556	1.1	34	12	0	0.9
Ivana Drmanac	5	0	3.4	.333	.000	.000	0.4	1	1	0	0.8
Sara Hieb	6	0	2.5	1.000	1.000	.000	0.0	0	1	0	0.5
Team							4.3				
Total	32			.425	.339	.722	35.0	423	287	86	67.7
Opponents	32			.417	.350	.700	36.6	423	223	115	62.9



Freshman Kelsey Griffin was the leading rebounder and No. 2 scorer.

Multi-Tasker

Husker senior Selig likes variety of heptathlon, pentathlon

By Terry Douglass

ASHLEY SELIG SENIOR MULTI-EVENTS

al champion in the indoor pentathlon.

"It has been a satisfying experience, and I've really exceeding my expectations," Selig said. "I didn't know what to expect coming to Nebraska, but I knew it was a place you could really develop.

"I feel like I've found a family with the track team and with the athletic department, and I'm just really thankful for my time there. It has really helped me open my eyes to what is possible."

For those unfamiliar with multi-event competitions, the indoor pentathlon requires competitors to compete in the 60-meter hurdles, 800-meter run, high jump, long jump and shot put. The outdoor heptathlon includes the 200, 800, 100 hurdles, high jump, long jump, shot put and javelin.

Both competitions obviously require plenty of versatility — an aspect Selig thrives on.

"I don't know if you'd call it pride, but there is something about being able to find that balance where you're fast enough, but you have endurance and you can jump well enough and you're strong enough to throw," Selig said. "Keeping them in balance is definitely a challenge, but it's a fun challenge and a really unique opportunity."

As for her favorite events, Selig said that answer changes from time to time.

"Probably the one that's clicking for you at the moment and making some big gains in," Selig said. "Mostly commonly, I enjoy the hurdles a lot, and I enjoy the jumps. The 800 and the long jump are probably my strengths or the two events that I score the most points in."

Nebbraska's Ashley Selig is the track and field version of a multi-tasker — a role that meshes with her personality perfectly.

Selig is listed on the Cornhuskers' roster as a "multi-events" competitor, meaning that the senior from Lincoln Lutheran does a little bit of almost everything. To be more specific, Selig is a standout performer in the pentathlon during the indoor season and the heptathlon during the outdoor campaign.

"I always try to do my best at whatever I'm doing, and it's fun to have some variety," Selig said. "If I was doing one event, to train day in and day out all year around like you have to do in college track, I think it would just drive me crazy.

"It's something new every day. There are always challenges."

Growing up, Selig competed in several sports, including volleyball, basketball, gymnastics and track and field. Although she briefly considered playing volleyball at a smaller college, Selig eventually decided to try track and field at Nebraska — a choice she's certainly never regretted.

Selig has been named an All-American performer while producing five combined top-seven national finishes in the pentathlon and the heptathlon. In 2005, she was the nation-



Scott Bruhn

Because of the long days of competition in the pentathlon and heptathlon, Selig said she has forged several friendships with other multi-event athletes.

"It's a real supportive group," Selig said. "I think a lot of times sprinters are characterized as real intense and ready to kill each other or whatever in competition, but for us, everyone kind of understands that we're all in the same boat.

"I've made great friends from other schools that I compete with. You've got to respect what they're doing."

Nebraska coach Gary Pepin said it requires a special kind of athlete to excel in multi-event competitions.

"It takes a strong worth ethic, and it takes somebody who doesn't get hurt a lot," Pepin said. "You have a lot of different types of training and the opportunity for a lot of different injuries."

Having to overcome injuries has indeed been an obstacle for Selig, especially this spring. In fact, pain in her back and hips forced Selig to miss much of Nebraska's early season outdoor schedule, leaving the remainder of her season a question mark.

"Really, all season I've struggled with some back and hip problems, but it has just kind of intensified lately," Selig said. "We're kind of working through the process right now. I competed at the Texas Relays, so I've kind of eliminated a redshirt season, but a medical redshirt is still a possibility."

Selig, who's scheduled to graduate in May with a degree in nutrition and exercise science, said that ideally, she'll be able to complete her eligibility this season.

"I'm just keeping my options open," Selig said. "I've been talking to my family, my coaches and the trainers, trying to figure out what would be the best decision for me."

Among the decisions Selig said she must weigh is whether or not she's capable of scoring points for the Nebraska women in the Big 12 Conference and NCAA outdoor national meets — even if she isn't 100 percent healthy. On an individual level, Selig would also like to make her best possible run at a national title in the outdoor heptathlon.

"That's another hard thing

because this outdoor season looks really promising for our team at nationals," Selig said. "Athletes always have to deal with injuries," Selig said. "Sometimes you can't compete at 100 percent — you just have to deal with what you have — and sometimes you can still have some very good performances like that.

"I just want to give myself the best chance for an outdoor season. If that means waiting until next season, then that might be the case."

Regardless of what comes next in Selig's athletic career, Pepin said Selig has had a significant impact upon the program and that she has represented herself well to the community and

as part of Nebraska's student-athlete advisory committee.

"Ashley has been a great team person," Pepin said. "You hear people talk about leaders by example, which Ashley is, but she can also verbalize herself very well. She's a very good speaker and public speaker. She has done a lot of things for the community.

"She's unquestionably one of the finest all-around student-athletes that we've ever had here — not only in track and field, but in the whole athletic department. She has just been an absolute jewel to work with." ■

Terry Douglass is the sports editor of the *Grand Island (Neb.) Independent*. He can be reached at terry.douglass@charter.net.

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TRACK AND FIELD



Junior Kayla Wilkinson (above) broke the school record in the women's javelin with a winning throw of 181-2 in the Nebraska Invitational April 15 at Ed Weir Stadium. Sophomore Dusty Jonas (below) flirted with matching the stadium high jump record of 7-6, but settled for 7-5.





Senior Stephanie Ruiz (above) was Nebraska's top individual, placing 13th with a 230, as the Huskers finished in a tie for fourth place in the Big 12 Women's Golf Championships April 17-19 at the Country Club of Lincoln. Sophomore Elli Brown (below) finished in a tie for 26th.



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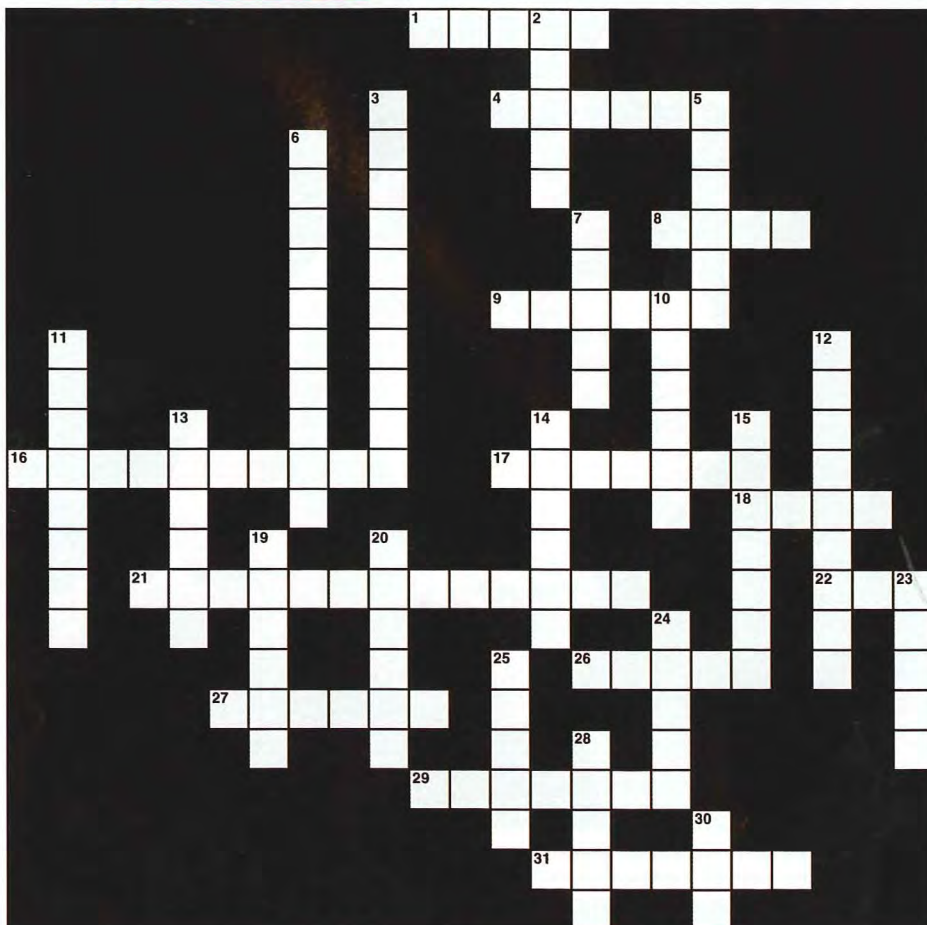
ACROSS

- 1 2005 Big 12 champion
- 4 First Big opponent in 2006
- 8 Quarterback who sat out Spring Game
- 9 Wears No. 2
- 16 Adam Carriker's home state
- 17 Turner Gill's new school
- 18 Leading receiver in Spring Game
- 21 Opponent in 2006 opener
- 22 Nonconference road opponent in 2006
- 26 Leading rushing in Spring Game
- 27 Leading tackler in 2005
- 29 Jay Moore's hometown
- 31 Football strength coach

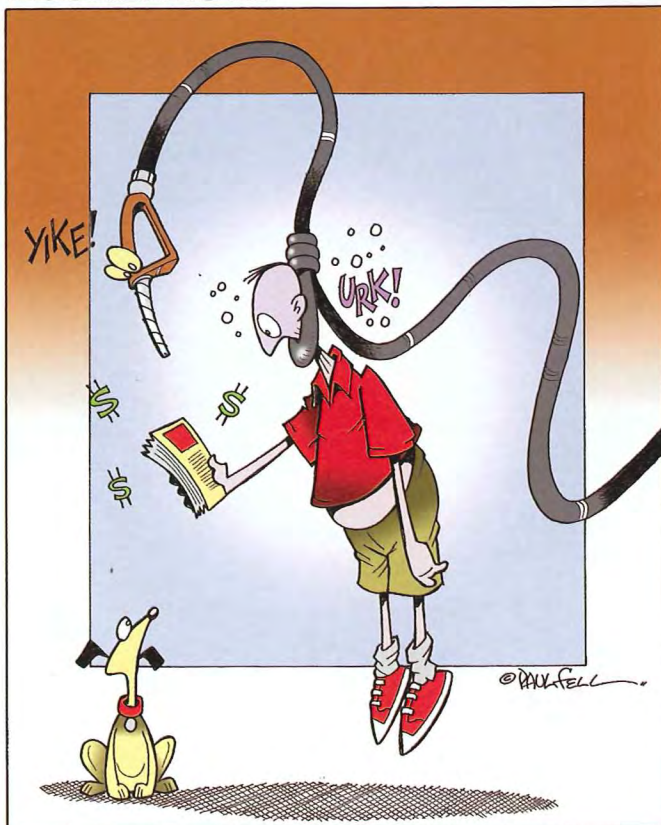
DOWN

- 2 NU's 2005 bowl
- 3 First Husker taken in 2005 NFL Draft
- 5 Terre Green's new position
- 6 Site of 2006 Big 12 Championship
- 7 Leading receiver in 2005
- 10 Wears No. 1
- 11 Had only interception in Spring Game
- 12 Defensive tackler from California
- 13 Junior college running back recruit
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- 24 Number of home games in 2006
- 25 Scored 2 touchdowns in Spring Game
- 28 Junior college cornerback recruit
- 30 Winning team in Spring Game

Answers in June/July issue



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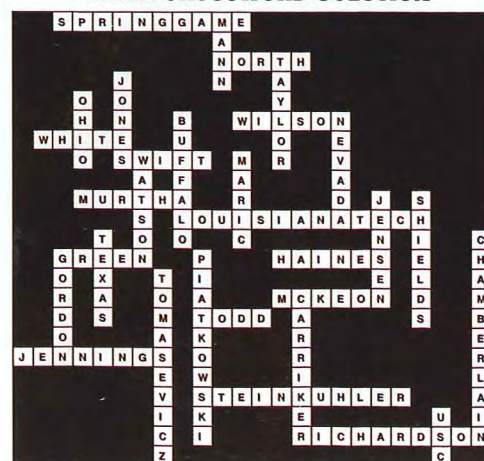
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'Big Nasties'

Slauson, teammates 'want to get back to the classic Nebraska offensive line'



**Mike
BABCOCK**

THE GOATEE HANGS from Matt Slauson's chin like moss on a Southern mansion, an appropriate metaphor considering Slauson's size. With time, and unchecked growth of the goatee, he might look like a missing member of ZZ Top, that little ol' band from Texas in the 1970s and 80s.

A reporter made such a comparison following the Spring Game.

"The coaches don't like it," Slauson said of the beard. "My mom hates it."

He smiled. "But I'm going to keep it," he said.

You get the sense, however, that if his mom insisted, he would shave it off.

If the beard and Slauson's size — 6-foot-5, 335 pounds — weren't imposing enough, the bridge of his nose was stitched, a reminder of a mishap during the previous Monday's practice.

Slauson was blocking when linebacker Steve Octavien blitzed. Running back Thomas Lawson blocked Octavien, whose shoulder pad "speared me right in the face," Slauson said.

The freshman offensive tackle left the field, got stitched up and returned to finish practice, and earn the respect of running backs coach Randy Jordan. "I love that kid," Jordan said.

Slauson doesn't want to be lovable. He wants to be nasty, a jerk. That's not easy for him, however. Off the field, he's a "big teddy bear." On the field, well, "I still have a little problem being a jerk," he said. "I don't really have that mentality. I try to, but it doesn't really work for me."

"It's just a switch you've got to flip."

Chris Patrick, also a tackle, can flip that switch. On the field, he's probably the biggest jerk in the offensive line, according to Slauson. And that's a compliment of the highest order.

"He likes getting in shots, as late as he can," said Slauson. "We love it. I mean, we keep it clean. But he loves to get in there and get some shots on those guys at the second level."

Guys at the second level are smaller linebackers, of course.

When Patrick gets beat — as all sometimes linemen do — "he gets so mad," Slauson said. "He gets angry, and then he starts butting heads, just grabbing . . . it's a lot of fun to watch him."

He goes full-bore until a whistle stops the play, likes to

get in one last shot as the whistle is sounding, in fact. Patrick also has earned Jordan's respect. He's "a nasty sucker, man," said Jordan. "I think those guys have really started to develop a nastiness it takes to be able to run the ball."

Developing the offensive line was a spring priority, enough so that coach Bill Callahan spent lots of hands-on time with it, as he did with the quarterbacks his first two springs at Nebraska.

Callahan coached the offensive line in the NFL, and his passion for teaching line play was obvious during the spring. "That's kind of where his heart lies, I think, and that's great for us because we love having him there," Slauson said. "He's just a technician. He works the angles, where your legs are supposed to be, you have to have your ankles strained, everything."

"He breaks every block down for every part of the body."

And he demands all-out effort snap after snap.

"Every once in a while he comes up to us and gives us a kick in the butt," said Slauson. "He says something like, 'Is that all you got? Are you giving us all you got?'"

"And we're like, 'No, dang it.'"

Slauson speaks as if he were a wayward child, chided by a parent.

Though competition will continue in training camp, Slauson, Patrick and Lydon Murtha were a step ahead of the other tackles in the spring. With Kurt Mann sidelined, Greg Austin and Andy Christensen worked with the first team at center, two weeks each, along with Brett Byford.

When Austin and Christensen weren't playing center, they were playing guard, along with Mike Huff. But again, the line isn't set, according to Wagner, who expects junior college transfer Carl Nicks to have an immediate impact, at either tackle or guard. "You're always developing," Wagner said.

Among the certainties, however, is the attitude the linemen tried to adopt during the spring. "We want to get back to the classic Nebraska offensive line . . . playing in the mud, just jerks," said Slauson. "It's a reputation the Nebraska line had back when we were the dominant option team. Those guys were just nasties, big nasties. They could dominate, and that's the mentality we have to have."

He'll have the look as well as the mentality. The stitches will be removed, but the goatee will continue to grow, to ZZ Top length. At least, "I hope so," he said. ■



Matt Slauson started the final three games last season as a freshman.

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At Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, we see the cost of the illness and chronic disease that result from inactive lifestyles every day. We believe that cost is much too high – and not just in terms of money. So we want you to know that even 30 minutes of moderate activity – like walking – several times a week can make a difference.

And we're encouraging Nebraskans to be more active with our **WalkingWorks**SM program. To get a pedometer at a reduced cost and to learn how **WalkingWorks** can keep you healthy and keep healthcare affordable, visit our Web site at www.bcsne.com.

The **Blues** are
good for you!



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